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Re-integration of sex trafficking victims in Romania -

And the role of the social work professionals

Abstract

Title: Re-integration of sex trafficking victims in Romania − And the role of the social work professionals

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Keywords: Re-integration, victims of sex trafficking, Romania, social worker's role, anti-trafficking organizations

The aim of this study was to explore how social work professionals describe re-integration of young female victims of sex trafficking in Romania. This study was based on eight semi-structured in-depth interviews with social work professionals in Romanian anti-trafficking organizations. These were later analyzed using thematic analysis. The research questions were as follows: How do the social work professionals describe successful re-integration of sex trafficking victims?, From the perspective of the social work professionals, which factors constrain or facilitate successful re-integration?, How do the social work professionals view their own role in the re-integration process?

The research findings indicate that the social work professionals relate successful re-integration to being independent and not in a vulnerable state. The professionals moreover describe the individual wishes and goals of the women as related to the successfulness of the re-integration. Findings show that there are several constraining as well as facilitating factors in the re-integration process of the trafficking victims. Depending on whether a factor is lacking or existing it can work either as constraining or facilitating. The presence or lack of social support resources was found to be of particular importance, as well as the women's personal resources such as their skills and capacities. Findings also highlight the paramount role of the social work professionals throughout the re-integration process, and how they have established tools enhancing the achievement of the women's own wishes and goals.

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

ANITP	Agenţia Naţională Împotriva Traficului de Persoan (National Agency Against Trafficking in Persons)
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
EU	The European Union
IOM	International Organization of Migration
UN	The United Nations
UNDOC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNHROHC	United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
WHO	The World Health Organization

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1. Introduction

"To have plans for the future, this is very important for them [...]. Because this is just a period of time, a transition. But life is not this, life is after [...]. And those who have plans have more chances to succeed." (Elena, a Romanian social work professional)

Romania is a significant source for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking throughout Europe (U.S. Department of State, 2017). According to Eurostat (2015), the majority of the registered trafficking victims in EU originate from Romania and Bulgaria. Most of the registered Romanian victims in the EU are trafficked for sexual purposes (69%), and 67% of them are women while 13% are girls (Eurostat, 2015). However, girls and women are also trafficked within the country, and the trafficking of minors is increasing. In 2018, the population of Romania was approximately 19.5 million. In Romania people at risk of poverty or social exclusion comprised of 35.7% of the population in 2017, which is the second highest rate in the EU (Eurostat, 2019). This means that nearly seven million Romanians might be in a higher risk of becoming vulnerable to different forms of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a serious crime and a severe human rights violation (UN, 2019). It refers to the process through which "individuals are placed or maintained in an exploitative situation for economic gain" (UN, 2014:1). Sex trafficking is one form of human trafficking, and it has long-term consequences for the victims, as it involves extremely serious physical and psychological violence and abuse (IOM, 2017). Statistics from the United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report on human trafficking (2016) shows that 54% of all registered victims were exploited sexually on a global level, and 96% of them were women. The high demand for women for sexual services is said to be the driving force in international trafficking of girls and women for sexual purposes (Okojie, 2009). Despite the fact that the majority of sex trafficking victims are known to be girls and women, also boys, men, and transgenders end up victimized across the globe (UN, 2014)[1].

The state of Romania has adopted the main international instruments related to human trafficking such as *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000),* which was ratified by the state in 2002 (UN, 2019). Furthermore, during the time of joining the European Union in 2007 (EU, 2019), the Romanian Government signed the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings* in 2005, and it entered into force in 2008 (Council of Europe, 2019). According to Gradinaru's (2015) research, since signing the aforementioned convention, the Romanian government has introduced a number of measures to combat human trafficking in the country and has a comprehensive set of regulations and standards at the national level. The main piece of legislation relating to human trafficking is the national anti-trafficking *Law No.678/2001* on *Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,* which was later amended and supplemented by *Law 230/2010*. This particular law provides measures for prevention, prosecution, assistance, and protection for victims of human trafficking (Gradinaru, 2015).

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[1] The term *sex trafficking* is discussed in chapter two - definitions of core terminology.

The National Agency Against Trafficking of Human Beings (ANITP) was established in 2006, and from thereon it has been responsible for developing the National Strategy against trafficking in persons in Romania. In cooperation with relevant governmental and non-governmental agencies it has also produced an action plan. The ANITP's responsibilities include coordination, evaluation, and monitoring the implementation of anti-trafficking measures at the national level, which includes prevention, protection, and assistance policies. (Gradinaru, 2015)

Prostitution and trafficking, as phenomena, are linked, and therefore the laws related to both of these acts should be seen as connected. Gradinaru explains that prior to 2014, Romania had criminalized the selling and decriminalized the buying of sex. From 2014, when the law changed, selling sex is no longer a criminal offence even though it is still considered a contravention and therefore, the women selling sex can be punished with a fine. This legal perspective can be viewed as decriminalizing prostitution due to the major changes in the law reform (Donevan, 2017; Hedlin, 2016). However, all forms of trafficking (Article 210), procuring, facilitating, and obtaining economic benefits from prostitution (Article 213) are prohibited in the *Criminal Code* (2014).

According to Roby (2012), research on human trafficking is in its infancy, and the social work perspective in particular is only sparsely represented in this field. Compared to the number of studies conducted about the characteristics of the victims and their life circumstances prior to trafficking, only a few studies have focused on post-trafficking life. The existing body of research on the re-integration phase of trafficking victims is small, specifically from the perspective of what constraints and facilitates this process. However, what is known, is for example the importance of the sufficient assistance provided e.g. by the social work professionals (e.g. Iovu, 2015; Palmer, 2010), the severeness of stigma in Romania as a constraining factor, and the important role of the family in the victims' re-integration (Surtees, 2012; Talens & Landman, 2003).

Nevertheless, from the current body of knowledge, it is clear that efforts should be increased in order to gain more knowledge to enrich the understanding of the issue of sex trafficking and the re-integration phase. According to Roby (2012), these efforts could in turn improve the assistance of the victims and their families, and furthermore, add to the improvement of policies and programs in this area. This study aims to contribute to the anti-trafficking field globally by studying the victims' re-integration process from the perspective of the assistance providers. Moreover, this study examines the importance of the social work professionals, and reveals the limitations affecting their ability to operate in the field. It is evident that when the professionals' work is restricted or complicated by the surrounding circumstances, it directly affects the re-integration of the women in need of the assistance. In order to provide sufficient assistance for the victims, the negative impact of the restrictions, the professionals face, deserves to get stronger attention.

1.1. Purpose and research questions

The aim of this study is to explore how the social work professionals describe re-integration of young female victims of sex trafficking in Romania.

In order to achieve this aim, the research questions were formulated as follows:

> *1. How do the social work professionals describe successful re-integration of sex trafficking victims?*
>
> *2. From the perspective of the social work professionals, which factors constrain or facilitate successful re-integration?*
>
> *3. How do the social work professionals view their own role in the re-integration process?*

1.2. Delimitations of the study

As the phenomenon of human trafficking is a complex and wide issue, it is clear that this Master's thesis can only cover some aspects. This study is limited to Romania, and more specifically to Romanian non-governmental organizations[2] doing anti-trafficking work in certain parts of the country. In exploring the social work professionals'[3] experiences of the re-integration of trafficking victims, whom they work with, this study has chosen to focus on female victims; more specifically young women.[4] This is due to the young women's strong representativeness in the statistics for trafficking victims.

This study explores the experience of re-integration of trafficked women through the eyes of the social work professionals. Choosing to interview professionals instead of the young women themselves can be seen as a delimitation, since the professionals are talking *about* the women. Nevertheless, this study does not intent to say how or what the young women experience during their re-integration, but rather how the professionals experience it.

1.3. Relevance to social work and human rights

It is important to note that human trafficking is clearly defined as a human rights violation, and many of the practices involved in trafficking are strictly prohibited under international human rights law (UN, 2014). Human rights violations in this context can be viewed as a cause for, as well as a consequence of human trafficking. Thus, protecting and promoting human rights globally are vital in the fight against trafficking. (UNHRC, 2016)

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[2] Will hereafter be referred to as *'organizations'*.

[3] Will hereafter be referred to as '*social work professionals'* or *'professionals'*

[4] Will hereafter be referred to as '*young women'* or *'women. '*

According to Roby (2012), the issue of sex trafficking has a direct link to social work through social work's leading concepts of promoting human rights, development, and social justice on both national and international level. The phenomenon of human trafficking affects people's wellbeing in a globalized environment, and it demands the attention of social work. Social work is able to provide a holistic framework for understanding human trafficking. It also facilitates different levels of intervention within the issue of trafficking by playing an important role in advocacy, policy development, direct practice, and research. (Roby, 2012)

The researchers' perception is that social work professionals can also play an important role in the outcome of the re-integration process. This view has been a motivator for this study to give a voice to these professionals' perspectives and experiences in the field. Human trafficking, and more specifically trafficking for sexual purposes, involves several human rights violations in different stages of the trafficking cycle. This study therefore aims to connect the issue to human rights, one of the main subjects of the Master's program in *Social Work and Human Rights*, within which this research is conducted. Furthermore, this study will connect to the social work aspect by bringing forth the social work professionals' views on the re-integration process of victims of human trafficking.

1.4. Structure of the paper

This chapter introduced the context for this study, the aim and research questions, as well as the delimitations and relevance of this study for the field of social work. The second chapter will present the theoretical framework for this study. Also, key terminology will be presented. After that, chapter three, will present a review of previous literature on the topic. This is followed by a presentation of the research methodology in chapter four. Thereafter, the findings are presented in chapter five, and discussed in chapter six. Finally, the conclusions are presented and discussed in chapter seven.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that will be used to interpret and analyze the results generated from this study. This theoretical framework consists of Self-Determination Theory, Social Support Theory, and the concepts of agency and re-integration. This is followed by a presentation of the core terminology needed to better understand this study. These are sex trafficking, the "loverboy method", and re-trafficking.

2.1. Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci (2000), is a theory studying human motivation and personality. It addresses a person's inherent psychological needs and established inner resources for personality development, so called *growth tendencies*. These are considered to be the basis for a person's self-motivation and *personality integration,* which refers to when "different aspects of personality are integrated into a relative harmonious whole" (Sheldon & Kasser, 1995:531) as well as the conditions nurturing them. Human beings are generally curious, agentic (seeking to be the origin of one's actions), inspired, and self-motivated, with a desire to learn, to extend themselves, to comprehend new skills, and to implement their talents. However, adversity or other obstacles may hinder these attributes, and hence result in the individual being diminished or crushed. This can sometimes lead to the rejection of growth and responsibility (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The theory also examines the social environments that are adversary towards positive developmental tendencies (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Vansteenkiste and Ryan (2013), SDT specifies the mechanisms that are involved in one's personality integration and growth tendencies, as well as the elements of social environments that facilitate or hinder a person's growth processes. SDT views humans as inherently oriented toward actualizing their capabilities through processes that include *intrinsic motivation*[5], *internalisation,* which refers to "the process of acceptance and incorporation of social standards and norms" (Calhoun, 2002, para. 1), personality integration, and connecting with others (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

Ryan and Deci (2000) identified three main intrinsic needs involved in one's self-determination that are crucial to facilitating desirable functioning of the natural tendencies for personal growth, personality integration, constructive social development, and wellbeing. Factors associated with one's poor social and economic conditions can discourage people's basic psychological needs, and thereby reduce their wellness (ibid). If the three human needs*: competence, relatedness and autonomy* are satisfied, people will develop healthily and be able to succeed in life. Ryan and Deci (2000) claim that in order to function well, people need to feel competent in both their external and internal environments. DeHaan et al. (2015) define competence as a person's need to experience productiveness and expertise in important activities in their life, which can occur when a person is provided with opportunities to acquire skills and to obtain informational feedback, supporting effectiveness. The second need, the experience of relatedness to other people and groups (Deci & Ryan, 2012), is experienced when a person cares for

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[5] Intrinsic motivation is further explained on page 6.

and is cared for by important others (DeHaan et al., 2015). Moreover, the experience of relatedness is hindered when a person feels isolated or disconnected from the important people around them (DeHaan et al., 2015). According to Deci and Ryan (2012), meaningful relationships and community involvement are strongly linked to whether a person deems that the need for relatedness has been satisfied. The third need of feeling autonomous in relation to humans' own behaviors and lives, means to "fully endorse and concur with the behavior one is engaged in" (Deci & Ryan, 2012:1). DeHaan et al. (2015) state that autonomy is seen as a person's need to feel their own behavior as voluntary and self-endorsed, in which case the state of being autonomous is fulfilled when one's behavior is experienced as choiceful and volitional. Autonomy is hindered when a person feels his behavior to be pressured or coerced by outside forces (DeHaan et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Deci and Ryan (2012), state that people can either be motivated by personal intrinsic valuation of certain activity, or due to a strong external inference. Through considering the distinguished forces that drive a person to act, SDT identifies different types of motivation that have specific consequences for a person's performance, personal experience, learning, and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Ryan and Deci (2000) developed SDT further and separated motivation into *intrinsic*, *extrinsic motivation*, and *amotivation*. They also distinguished the concepts of autonomous and controlled motivations, which refer to whether the motivation is fully internalized by the individual or not, and whether it is affected by the external regulations or not (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

According to Ryan and Deci (2000:70), intrinsic motivation refers to the positive potential of human nature and is defined as "the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn.". Deci and Ryan (2012) state that intrinsic motivation is most powerfully influenced by the individual's autonomy and competence, but at the same time relatedness has a distant role in the maintaining process. Intrinsic motivation is positively affected by the individual's gained concrete rewards but also diminished by threats, directives, imposed goals or pressure (ibid). Ryan and Deci (2000) state that a choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation due to a greater feeling of autonomy. Studies (e.g. Frodi, Bridges & Grolnick, 1985) show that intrinsic motivation is easily observable as exploratory behavior in early childhood and is predicted to be stronger in cases of security, attachment and maternal autonomy support, as well as that the poorer the attachment in the childhood, the lower the intrinsic motivation of an individual. Thus, a secure relational base is important for the expression of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Deci and Ryan (2012) describe extrinsic motivation referring to doing a certain activity for the reasons of it leading to a separate consequence as the goal is separate from this activity itself. These activities are performed because the significant others to whom the person feels/ wants to feel attached or related to, recommend, shape, or value these behaviors (ibid). Amotivation on the other hand is a state where a person lacks motivation; the intention to behave or act a certain way (ibid). According to Deci and Ryan (2012), when a person lacks either a sense of efficacy or a sense of control with respect to a desired outcome, they most likely become amotivated.

As Deci and Ryan (2012) state, a person's social contexts, both closer and distant, affect their need satisfaction and the type of motivation. Moreover, the social contexts affect the person's wellness and effectiveness, but also whether one's *life goals* tend to be more intrinsic or more extrinsic. This in turn can be said to affect the person's important life outcomes. The extrinsic

life goals and aspirations mostly concern wealth, being viewed as attractive or becoming famous, while the intrinsic ones are related to personal growth, developing meaningful relationships, contributing to the community, and being healthy. Personal growth is closely related to becoming more autonomous, integrated, more competent and more related to others. Some studies (e.g. McHoskey 1999) have also shown that the ones having relatively stronger drive to pursue extrinsic aspirations than the intrinsic ones, often have lower self-esteem and self-actualization. These persons have a higher tendency for depression and anxiety, but they are also more likely to engage in high risk behaviors. As extrinsic goals are often pursued for controlled motives, the reasons for pursuing extrinsic goals can be related to a person's poorer psychological health compared to cases of pursuing intrinsic goals, which are more likely to be pursued for autonomous reasons. (Deci & Ryan, 2012)

Autonomous motivation, intrinsic life goals and aspirations, effective functioning, and wellbeing are facilitated both developmentally and situationally by social contexts. It is also said that when people enjoy the state of being autonomous, they exhibit greater engagement, vitality, and creativity in their life activities, relationships, and projects. Moving towards the direction of greater autonomy means maintaining a person's intrinsic motivation and interest, which are vital for comprehending new ideas and life experiences. (Deci & Ryan, 2012)

SDT is believed to provide a fitting theoretical framework for analyzing the results of this study. Due to its focus on human motivation and personality, it can be of great use in exploring how the social work professionals describe the re-integration process of the women in relation to the role of their capabilities and attributes. Moreover, SDT can assist in exploring the professionals' description of successful re-integration as the findings show how this state is related to women's motivation and life goals. In this study SDT, as presented by Ryan and Deci (2000), will be used in analyzing the findings. More specifically, the inherent human needs, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and life goals presented in this chapter are discussed in relation to the findings.

2.2. Social Support Theory

The concept of social support is multi-faceted and has been difficult to conceptualize, define, and measure. Nevertheless, researchers have, since the 1970's, been attempting to define its meaning, which has resulted in a broad range of definitions of the concept (Hupcey, 1998). Commonly it has been described as the "perception or experience that one is loved and cared for by others, esteemed and valued, and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations" (Taylor, 2012:2). Social support can be provided by e.g. a partner, relatives, friends, colleagues, an organization, social and community ties, and even a pet (Allen et al., 1991). Social support can also come from a governmental level e.g. in forms of financial aid or housing.

The different functions of social support can be categorized into emotional, tangible, and informational ones. Emotional support contributes to the feeling that one is loved and cared about, and includes aspects such as intimacy, attachment, and the ability to confide in and rely on another. Examples of tangible support functions are direct aid or other services such as loans, material or financial gifts, or simply taking care of a person in need. Informational support on the other hand involves providing information, feedback or advice that can help a person solve a problem (Schaefer et al., 1981).

Vaux (1990) has developed a definition for and understanding of social support that takes an ecological perspective into consideration. He believes that it is best viewed as a complex process that unfolds in an ecological context, being shaped by both personal features, such as social skills, personality, and distress, as well as social ecological features in the social context. These can e.g. be stressors or social roles and settings. This process includes negotiation between individuals and their social networks, involving an active development and maintenance of the support network resources.

According to Vaux (1990), social support can be viewed as a meta-construct that builds on three conceptual components: social support network resources, support behavior, and subjective appraisal of support. The first component, social support network resources, is a set of relationships from which a person receives help dealing with demands and achieving one's goals. Support behavior represents the different acts that are generally identified as intentional efforts to assist someone and can take place in various modes such as emotional, guidance, practical, material, feedback, or socializing. The third component, subjective appraisal of support, concerns the subjective evaluations that individuals make of their existing support network resources and the support behavior that develops within these relationships. A person's appraisal of support seems to be an especially crucial influence on wellbeing.

Social work practice is often concerned with the client's social support system. Strength-based social work, which is a common approach in the field, is an example of this, since it is based on the belief that all individuals have strengths and resources, and focuses its practice on a person's skills, interests, and social support systems (Nissen et al., 2005). The ecological model of Social Support Theory developed by Vaux (1990) also serves as a framework for intervention, highlighting targets and strategies for programs designed to facilitate social support. He has identified several tactics that can help professionals assist the client to develop and maintain support resources. With these intervention strategies it is possible to e.g. make accurate assessments of the individual's support networks, and thereby also identify those that are grossly inadequate. Moreover, the tactics can help determine relative strengths and weaknesses in the existing networks, as well as identify those support networks that best serve particular at risks groups or individuals dealing with specific life stressors or transitions. Gottlieb (2000) has found that the forms and meanings of social support vary according to gender, age, and ethnicity. Therefore, it is important for interventions to be culturally sensitive.

The theory of social support is found to be applicable to this study since it provides a broad theoretical understanding of the role social support resources have in a person's life, especially in adversity. Moreover, it is identified as an important consideration within the field of social work. Earlier research (e.g. Aninoșanu et al., 2016; Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012a) including the findings of this study indicate the paramount role of social support in the re-integration process of the victims of human trafficking. Therefore, it is arguable that Social Support Theory provides a constructive framework for the analysis of the findings of this study.

For the aim of this study, the definition and understanding of social support as developed by Vaux (1990) will be used. Hence, when discussing social support in relation to the findings of this study it will be understood as the "complex process unfolding in an ecological context [...] involving transactions between people and their social networks, including the active development and maintenance of support network resources, the management of support incidents to elicit appropriate supportive behavior from the network and the synthesis of information to yield support appraisals" (Vaux, 1990:507).

2.3. Agency

Rogers et al. (2013) present that researchers, such as sociologists, have shown continuous interest towards human agency over decades. Throughout the years, different definitions and views of the concept have been developed. According to Deveaux (2002:15), agency can be viewed as having the role of "central importance for feminist theorists". From the perspective of feminist theories agency is defined as "concerned with the social conditions for and requirements of action, as well as with the internal and external barriers to action" (ibid). Human agency in social work theory can be seen as the capacity to determine and make meaning from one's environment, which is done through purposive consciousness and reflective and creative action (Houston, 2010). Rogers et al. (2013) state that agency is seen as the capacity for people to act of their own free will. According to social theorists, agency is relative and arises from, and is related to the options made available by a person's position in a wider context such as society, economy, culture, and political system (Rogers et al., 2013).

Agency is often viewed as an ambiguous (Loyal & Barnes, 2001), and multidimensional concept (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015). Hitlin and Johnson (2015) state that in order to understand modern life course it is necessary to understand subjective agency as multidimensional. This means seeing agency as involving both perceived capacities and perceived life chances. Even if agency is often linked to other concepts such as motivation, chance, resilience, self-direction, and planfulness, the authors argue that agency is not strictly an inborn psychological feature or a motivational drive, but rather an individually developed resource varying across social stratification, personal experiences, and one's life course (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015).

Human agency has been restricted primarily to personal agency exercised individually. However, Bandura (2000) states that agency should be seen from the socio-cognitive theory perspective, which means that agency is distinguished among three different forms: personal, proxy, and collective. The latter two are social in their nature and have a strong link to the environment of a person. In Social Cognitive Theory, a broader agency thinking is applied where individually exercised personal agency is not the only form of agency through which human beings manage the life events affecting them (ibid). According to Bandura (2000), this is due to the fact that people need others to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own. Therefore, it can be said that people do not live their lives in individual autonomy as in many cases a person does not have direct control over institutional practices and social conditions around them.

As social work in the global North has strongly aimed to be an agency-based practice, human agency can be viewed as the core of social work that seeks to locate and understand human action as an individual interacting with their environment (Hugman, 2009). Reisch and Jani (2012) argue that social work positions people with the agency "to make their own history" through interacting with the environment. However, in today's political environment, this principle needs to be reasserted because it reflects an alternative vision of people, society, and the process of change (ibid). Garrett (2015) states that today's criticism related to the trend of individualism in contemporary social work practice share different views. Garrett (2015) for instance criticizes the state directing social work towards an individual analysis of social problems, which leads to social work being pressured to focus on individuals changing their own actions and behavior as a solution to their problems. Thus, according to Garrett (2015), social work is strongly directed towards the clients' human agency, while at the same time often leaving the state's responsibility to lesser attention. Contemporary social work's strong focus

on the individual, and therefore also on human agency, has been connected to neo-liberalism as well (Hyslop, 2012). On the other hand, it has been argued that, due to the strong individualistic focus of social work, it has distanced itself from the society level's critical resistance and from challenging the status quo (Reisch & Jani, 2012).

The concept of agency is believed to be applicable to this study due to its strong link to social work and the professionals' ability and competence to strengthen their clients' agency. Agency is therefore also considered as a relevant concept for analyzing the interviewed professionals' working practice and approach with the target group. As agency is viewed as an individually developed resource (Hitlin & Johnson, 2015), this concept can be used in exploring the professionals' descriptions of the personal attributes and competencies of the young women in relation to their re-integration process. In the discussion chapter of this study the definition by Rogers et al. (2013) is used where agency is portrayed as a capacity possessed by people to act of their own free will. Agency is relative and arises from, and is related to the options made available by a person's position in a wider context such as society, economy, culture, and political system (ibid).

2.4. Re-integration

The concept of integration is often, but not exclusively, connected to migrants or minorities in a society, and can be defined as "the process of becoming an accepted part of society" (Penninx, 2005:141). This process of integration takes place in the legal/political, the socio-economic, and the cultural/religious dimension (ibid). Hence, to re-integrate is to integrate anew, as a result of the state of integration being interrupted, e.g. by a period of trafficking.

The re-integration of victims of human trafficking takes place in the post trafficking phase, and applies to victims trafficked both abroad and within the country of origin. Re-integration can be defined as "the process of inclusion and re-building relationships within a community in the country of origin at four levels: physical, socio-economic, socio-political, and cultural" (Rodicio, 2001:30). The physical level includes the resettlement of the returnees in a specific territorial area within their country of origin. On a socio-economic level the focus lies in attaining a dignified standard of living, which is similar to the one of the local population and the economic situation of the country of origin. The socio-political level emphasizes the democratic participation of the returnees in decision-making processes that affect their lives in all levels of society. Lastly, on a cultural level, the re-integration process takes into consideration the fact that both the returnee and the people around them can be in need of re-adaptation to each other. This can come as a result of the fact that different processes and experiences may have resulted in different ways of understanding reality and cultural paradigms. In addition to this, the recovery process, where mental and physical wellbeing is achieved, can be considered a part of the re-integration phase (Surtees, 2008).

It is important to emphasize that this definition refers to re-integration as a process of *inclusion.* Hence, a person can be integrated to different levels of the society without being properly included in it. When (social) inclusion is discussed as part of re-integration in this study, it refers to a "process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of their background, so that they can achieve their full potential in life" (UN- DESA, 2009:3), and feel as a valued and important part of the society (Collins Dictionary, n.d). This process is multi-dimensional and aims to create conditions, which enable active and full participation

of all members of society in all aspects of life including social, economic, civic, and political activities in addition to participation in decision-making processes (UN-DESA, 2009).

To be noted, in this paper when successful re-integration is discussed, it refers to a state where the aforementioned condition is fulfilled. Whereas unsuccessful re-integration refers to a state where the aforementioned condition is not reached, or some important parts are still lacking.

2.5. Definitions of core terminology

This section presents the core terminology used in this study. The definitions presented here indicate how these terms and concepts are viewed in this study.

2.5.1. Sex Trafficking

The most commonly used definition of human trafficking is the one of the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (2000),* which defines human trafficking of adult human beings as:

> "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation"

According to the UN (2014), the "means" element is not applied in the case of minors. Thus, minors are legally defined as victims, if it is possible to identify an "action" (such as recruitment, buying, and selling) committed for the specific purpose of exploitation. Human trafficking does not require crossing international borders, as it can occur internally as well (ibid).

Sex trafficking refers to a situation where individuals are forced, coerced or lured into providing sexual services. This is normally practiced for the purpose of commercial or individual gain of the trafficker. (Human Trafficking Hotline, 2019). Victims of sex trafficking are most often girls and women (Eurostat, 2015) who are forced to work as prostitutes in the commercial sex or adult entertainment industries (Crawford, 2017). These women and girls are exploited mostly in escort services, pornography industry, street prostitution, residential brothels, and in window prostitution, strip clubs, hotels, and massage businesses (Eurostat, 2015).

2.5.2. The "Loverboy Method"

"Loverboys" are part of human trafficking networks, with the mission to make young women fall in love with them or to manipulate them in some alternative way. Getting a potential victim under their influence and control makes it possible to exploit the women in the sex industry. (Government of Netherlands, 2019) The "loverboy" employs psychological methods to obtain the initial consent of the potential victim to, for example, leave to work abroad. This method is also often used in Romania, where sometimes the "loverboy" is both the recruiter and the trafficker (Aninosanu et al., 2016).

2.5.3. Re-trafficking

Re-trafficking (or "re-victimization") can, according to Adams (2011), be defined as a condition where a former sex trafficking victim gets back to the situation where he or she is exploited by traffickers again. Due to the victim's strong need for counseling, financial support, and both legal and medical aid, victim's assistance is vital in preventing re-trafficking. According to The World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), there is a particular vulnerability in once trafficked persons associated with the prior exploitation that can lead to re-trafficking. The continuing state of vulnerability related to trauma, stigma, lack of social networks, and employment often leads to re-trafficking. The failure to be treated as, and legally recognized as a victim of trafficking is also linked to one ending up re-trafficked (Adams, 2001).

3. Literature review

This chapter will present the relevant research findings related to the problematics of sex trafficking in Romania in general, and the re-integration process of the trafficking victims in particular. The literature review, moreover, aims to position this research in the scope of these earlier findings and more explicitly to create a broad understanding of the issue of sex trafficking, and re-integration in the Romanian context, as well as the social workers' role in assisting the victims in their re-integration. In order to do this, earlier research will be presented through the themes of re-integration of trafficking victims, the victims' vulnerability and background, factors influencing the re-integration process, which are divided into individual situations and external influences, and the social work professional's role and confronted challenges. The chapter concludes with a summary of the current body of research.

Most of the existing literature and studies related to human trafficking concentrate on the victims' experience of trafficking and his or her background, such as why the person was vulnerable to trafficking in the first place. Even though some studies have been done on post-trafficking life, the existing body of research on the re-integration phase of the trafficking victims is small. Research on what specifically constraints and facilitates the re-integration of sex-trafficking victims is even rarer to come across. The studies (e.g. *Good practices on (re)integration of victims of trafficking in human beings in six European countries* by Talens & Landman, 2003) that exist have mostly been done by or in co-operation with anti-trafficking organizations.

3.1. Re-integration of trafficking victims

In general, not much research has been done on what the re-integration process actually consists of, and what it implies for a trafficking victim. However, some efforts have been done to understand this process and its important aspects. Surtees (2008) states that, when discussing the concept of re-integration in relation to trafficking victims it is of paramount importance to keep in mind that in some cases, these persons may have never experienced social integration or social inclusion before the trafficking period. Mostly this is then a result of the person having been socially, economically, or culturally marginalized in their country and/or community of origin (ibid).

Bearup (2016) states that victims of trafficking can start their re-integration process either on their own or assisted by service providers such as local anti-trafficking organizations. It has been found that many trafficking victims return to their country of origin and re-integrate by seeking personal solutions to their problems, and hence re-integrate without the assistance of organizations (Talens & Landman, 2003). Assisted re-integration can include the "provision of comprehensive programs designed to re-integrate victims of trafficking into society, e.g. through actively preventing stigmatization, job training, legal assistance and health care, and by making measures to co-operate with non-governmental organizations to provide for the social, medical, and psychological care of the victims" (Bearup, 2016:167). Furthermore, Surtees (2013) suggests that empowerment is a central aspect of successful re-integration of the

trafficking victim. This includes supporting the individual in developing skills "toward independence and self-sufficiency, and to be actively involved in their recovery and (re)integration" (Surtees, 2013:37).

Also, Talens and Landman (2003) highlight that the empowerment perspective implies that the conditions to live a 'normal' life in safety must exist for the trafficking victims. Accordingly, "they must be given possibilities to develop to the full their autonomy and personal capacities" (Talens & Landman, 2003:55). In the process of re-integration, this is based on their opportunities for work, education, and training as well as access to physical and mental health services in their home country (ibid).

3.2. Vulnerability and the background of the victims

In their report *Who Is The Next Victim? Vulnerability Of Young Romanian Women To Trafficking In Human Beings* Lăzăroui and Alexandru (2003) analyzed the results from quantitative and qualitative research looking at both individual attributes and environmental factors influencing Romanian girls' vulnerability to trafficking. These factors include for example a person's family and the surrounding community. The girls in vulnerable state and the ones in non-vulnerable state were found to present different levels of social integration. The girls in vulnerability were for example found more likely to feel that they have nobody around them or that life is not worth living, which is a factor not found in the group of girls in a non-vulnerable position. The findings show that the girls in risk of vulnerability are mostly 15-25 years old, coming from single-parent families, and are often from medium-sized towns. Unemployment was found to be another notable factor linked to the vulnerability. (ibid.)

This is also supported by Aninosanu et al. (2016) who conducted a research called *Trafficking for sexual exploitation of Romanian women. A qualitative research in Romania, Italy and Spain* in partnership with two Romanian organizations, interviewing Romanian anti-trafficking professionals and trafficking victims. They present similar vulnerabilities related to the potential victims' age, socio-economic status, and family background in their report as found in the research by Lăzăroui and Alexandru (2003). Furthermore, Aninosanu et al. (2016) state that minors represent up to 40% of the Romanian victims of sexual exploitation.

Lăzăroui and Alexandru (2003) state that the highest risk of being trafficked is for young Roma women as well as girls who have not graduated from high school due to dropping out. Studying was found not to be viewed as the way to succeed by neither the girls in vulnerable state nor their families. Moreover, finding a job in order to provide financially is valued. The authors present that this mindset could be one possible factor behind the school dropouts and for going abroad to look for work opportunities. These girls in a vulnerable state were also found to be more independent and open to different kinds of experiments, including the willingness to accept uncertainty and risk, which can lead to trafficking (ibid.)

Many of these girls and women in vulnerable situations are often recruited into trafficking by persons using psychological methods in order to get closer to the victims (Lăzăroui & Alexandru, 2003). Pretending to be the victim's lover or partner is a commonly used example of this. This so called "Loverboy Method" has been found to be used by both recruiters and traffickers

(Aninosanu et al., 2016). Palmer's (2010) findings also shows that family members or boyfriends are commonly involved in the trafficking. Similarly, to Aninosanu et al. (2016), Palmer (2010) highlights how sex trafficking victims sometimes tend to fall in love with their trafficker during the trafficking period.

3.3. Factors influencing the re-integration process

The factors constraining and facilitating re-integration have been explored in a few studies. Talens and Landman (2003), for instance, have made an effort to map the different factors influencing the process of re-integration whereof seven main contributors have been identified; the individual, health, family situation, the state, conditions of return, society and stigmatization, and economic factors in the origin countries. These elements will be further discussed as factors related to the individual situation and to external influences.

3.3.1. Individual situation

Surtees (2012:65) found that the individual situation of the trafficking victim "(e.g. responsibilities, ambitions and plans, skills, psychological state and aptitude) will significantly impact the success (or failure) of any reintegration efforts, including in terms of economic empowerment". Talens and Landman (2003) claim that since the re-integration period requires the victim to readapt to a certain social situation, working environment, lifestyle or behavior, the individual's own coping mechanisms, and characteristics play a paramount role.

Palmer (2010) states that victims of human trafficking have complex and wide-ranging needs for services that arise from the specific form of exploitation they have been coerced to. Talens and Landman (2003:13) highlight that many victims exploited sexually also suffer from various health consequences from the trafficking period ranging from "STDs, complications caused by abortions, to mental health problems". The support and treatment the victim receives for their health condition can influence the successfulness of the re-integration (ibid).

One of the most highlighted influencing factor in the re-integration process is the individual's family situation. Brunovskis and Surtees (2012a:51) found in their research that "family members can (and often do) play a crucial role in the successful reintegration of trafficking victims but they can also be a hindrance in recovery if relationships become too difficult". Moreover, family is often the main source of support and a crucial safety net, especially in countries where state and civil society assistance is weak, which emphasizes the importance of understanding family dynamics in post-trafficking family reunification, and alternatives for recovery and re-integration (ibid).

The problematic aspects of family re-integration for returning Moldovan female victims of sex trafficking have been studied by Brunovskis and Surtees (2012b). The authors state that their findings point to the need of including a more comprehensive perspective of family relationships in the study of re-integration of trafficking victims. Thus, "to fail to take the family into account in interventions is to miss an important factor" (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012b: 468).

Aninoșanu et al. (2016) state that love and support from the family are two key factors in lowering the risks and vulnerabilities, but also in preventing Romanian women from being re-trafficked.

Brunovskis and Surtees (2012b) found one main obstacle for the family re-integration to be the mutual disappointment that in turn provokes resentment. Families were disappointed when the victim did not provide financially, as hoped, while the victims themselves felt disappointed by the lack of support and understanding from their family members (ibid.).

3.3.2. External influences

Talens and Landman (2003) highlight the state's role in the post trafficking life of the victim being the main actor responsible for its citizens' rights and security to be ensured. Therefore, existing or lacking regulations and official support mechanisms for trafficking victims do affect the returnees' re-integration. Another factor related to the responsibility of the state, but also the established anti-trafficking organizations are the conditions for the victims' return, which refers to how they can be guaranteed a secure arrival to their country of origin after the trafficking period. (ibid.)

Stigmatization is pointed out as one of the most severe problems and obstacles in the re-integration of trafficking victims, especially for women exploited in the sex industry. The stigma exists on many levels of the society including community and family level, and the reaction of these units, if the trafficking period is revealed, can have serious repercussions on the re-integration process (ibid). In order to avoid stigma, rejection, or even violence many victims do not see any other choice than keeping their trafficking experience a secret (Surtees, 2012). However, it has also been found that even women who managed to keep their trafficking experience a secret were distressed by the fear of stigma (Brunovskis and Surtees, 2012b). Moreover, stigmatization of the women might lead to feelings of isolation and rejection, leading the women to leave their family or community and making them vulnerable to being re-trafficked (Talens & Landman, 2003).

In addition, it is found that not only the availability of re-integration support services determines the trafficked person's participation in these, but also their willingness to access the services. Research has showed how stigma functions as an obstacle to accessing the services needed. The unwillingness to approach or accept services can be a function of lack of trust, which results from discrimination or stigma that the person faces, or expects to experience (Brunovskis & Surtees, 2012a).

Furthermore, the economic factors such as the victim's financial situation in their home environment is found to highly influence re-integration (Talens & Landman, 2003). According to Talens and Landman (2003), many victims originate from poor backgrounds, and are also likely to return to same or worse conditions after the trafficking period. When observing the economic situation of the victim after the trafficking phase, one important aspect brought up by Surtees (2012) is the role and influence of work opportunities in their re-integration. The report shows that successful, sustainable, and fitting job placements should also help overcome various challenges and obstacles. Some of which derive from residual effects of the trafficking period such as stress, anxiety, trauma, and lack of trust, whereas others stem from individual situations and characteristics of the victim, e.g. their educational and professional background (ibid). Surtees (2012) found that additional challenges are linked to the social and economic environment, and

include factors such as limited job opportunities, few job opportunities in the victim's areas of origin, and preconceptions and stigma of employers.

3.4. The professionals' role and confronted challenges

According to Hall et. al (2017) the best practice to combat the trafficking cycle is through proper rehabilitation of the victims where the professionals play an important role (Hall et al., 2017). Palmer (2010) similarly points out that social workers have an important input in meeting the needs of trafficking victims due to their great skills in assisting people with traumas. Moreover, social workers have an important role in assisting victims by providing them for example social welfare, mental health assistance, and victim advocate services. Teaching basic life skills and providing support in becoming independent are other important tasks of the social workers. In order to do this, social workers often use the empowerment approach, which "seeks to enhance the natural abilities and skills of the individual and family as well as add resources and support" (Palmer 2010:53). According to Palmer (2010), group work skills that social workers have may help bring organizations together for problem solving, dialogue, and advocacy. The most valuable service is offered through intensive case management, which may best be delivered in residential facilities (Palmer, 2010). In line with this, Aninoșanu et al. (2016) found that the assistance offered to the victims in Romania by anti-trafficking organizations is often based on an individual plan.

Palmer (2010) states that social workers bear skills that are needed in working with victims of trafficking as well as in cooperating with other societal actors supporting the victims. Hence, social workers can be of further assistance in designing programs or even training law enforcement and other service providers. Facilitating in bringing organizations together for dialogue, problem solving, and advocacy are other examples of social workers' contributions to the anti-trafficking field. (Palmer, 2010) In the Romanian specific context, Aninosanu et al. (2016) found that the level of expertise of the anti-trafficking professionals, and the quality of their services have increased significantly during the past years.

Gradinaru (2015) conducted a qualitative research, *Best practice model on assistance for victims of trafficking in human beings*, and interviewed experts (e.g. social workers) in the anti-trafficking field in Romania. The main findings from the study were organizations' inappropriate funding, the staff's need for more training, and the regionally varying differences in the quality of the assistance. Moreover, the professionals felt overwhelmed by the burdening of the tasks, and affected by the lack of resources, not to mention poor salaries.

In her research Iovu (2015) aimed to identify the contextual factors that either hinder or facilitate the anti-trafficking work from the local actors' perspective. The obstacles experienced by the organizations in operating under the current prostitution laws and the current law enforcement, and the experience of insufficient financial support provided to the organizations by ANITP were found to be the most hindering factors. The lack of political will to tackle trafficking in Romania, together with the experience of law enforcement officers' practices hindering anti-trafficking work due to the corruption issues and stigmatization of women in prostitution were additional identified contextual factors.

3.5. Current body of research: a summary

During the process of composing this literature review, the current body of research in the discussed topic was found to be fairly limited. Nevertheless, one important aspect of the trafficking cycle, that has been studied more extensively, is the background and characteristics of trafficking victims and the ones at risk. The vulnerabilities of these individuals are important views to take into consideration also in the re-integration phase. Research on what re-integration of trafficking victims refers to is explored to a very limited extent. From previous literature it is known that many victims re-integrate without assistance, while others are supported by organizations. The empowerment approach is found to be connected to the positive outcome of the re-integration. Different factors have been found to influence the re-integration process. The family's role, access to economic resources, stigmatization, and the assistance provided by organizations are the most frequently highlighted components in earlier research based on this literature review. A narrow body of research has studied the social workers' role in supporting trafficking victims in their re-integration. The previous studies show that the professionals in the field are skilled to assist the trafficked women as a target group.

Compared to the highlighted importance of the social work professionals, in the light of earlier research, their voices are heard somewhat rarely. There is a lack of literature exploring how professionals view their role in the re-integration of trafficking victims. Moreover, no studies were found to have researched what the social work professionals experience as influencing factors in the re-integration process, focusing specifically on the Romanian context. Furthermore, in the process of reviewing earlier research no studies on what the formerly trafficked women themselves wish for their future, and how these wishes would connect to re-integration, were found.

This study provides a platform for social work professionals to voice their experiences of the re-integration process and its influences. By interviewing participants working in different anti-trafficking organizations in Romania, the study can provide an important contribution to the understanding of the professionals' experiences in the field. Moreover, it can bring light to the current challenges they face in performing their work in the Romanian context. This study also gives an insight into what the professionals describe as the most common wishes and goals of the women they support in re-integrating. Thus, as the importance of the women's own future aspects are not priorly studied, neither from their own perspective nor from the perspective of anti-trafficking professionals, it somewhat limits the understanding of successful re-integration. This specific angle and perspective of the professionals is explored in this study.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents the chosen methodology and procedure of the study. Firstly, the chosen methodology is discussed, after which the work division between the researchers is presented. This is followed by a section about how the background material was compiled. Thereafter, the data collection process is presented by discussing the semi structured in-depth interview technique as well as the sampling and interview procedures. This is followed by an overview of the data analysis process where also the thematic analysis method and the transcribing process are presented. Thereafter, the ethical considerations for this study will be discussed along with an examination of the reliability, validity and generalization of the study. Finally, personal motivation behind the chosen topic and our prior knowledge is discussed.

4.1. Justification of methodology

This study is of qualitative nature. Qualitative research emphasizes words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2016), which suits the aim of this study, as we are interested in exploring how the social work professionals describe re-integration of young female victims of sex trafficking in Romania. According to Kothari (2004), a study that aims to deepen the understanding of, and gain insights into a topic that has not been studied to a large extent, is of exploratory nature. Thus, it can be said that this study fits to the area of exploratory research. To retrieve the data of this study, we have chosen to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews, which is a form of qualitative interviewing and one of the main research methods associated with qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). In-depth interviewing is carried out in order to gain a thorough insight into a specific issue, and is preferable to use when anticipating that the interviewee will be asked to "explain their answers or give examples or describe their experiences" (Rubin & Rubin 2005:3), which was the case of this study. Moreover, the semi-structured method of interviewing was picked due to it being a flexible but yet structured tool for the explorative approach serving the aim of this study.

According to Bryman (2016), social research methods are strongly connected to the various visions of how social reality should be studied. He means that these methods are not only tools but "they are linked with the ways in which social scientists perceive the connection between the different viewpoints about the nature of social reality and how they should be examined" (Bryman, 2016:17). Hence, it is important to define the epistemological and ontological approaches used to frame this study.

Epistemology can be understood as the justification of knowledge and concerns what is valid knowledge and how it can be obtained (Carter & Little, 2007). Since the epistemological stand underlines the whole research process, and the chosen theoretical perspectives, it is important to properly reflect on this. For this study, the chosen epistemological orientation is interpretivism, which is a common approach in qualitative studies. According to interpretivism a "strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of natural science and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, 2016:26). This is found to be a fitting orientation due to this study's interest in the social work professionals' subjective experiences and descriptions of the women's' re-integration. The

ontological approach, on the other hand, is concerned with "the nature of social entities" (Bryman, 2016:28) and their relation to social actors. For the purpose of this study the ontological position of constructionism has been chosen. This stand asserts that "social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors" (Bryman, 2016:29), which implies that they are not only shaped but also constantly reshaped by social interaction. Moreover, a constructionist position is "displaying 'multiple constructed realities' through the shared investigation (by researchers and participants) of meanings and explanations" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:14). It is considered fitting for this research due to the aim of exploring how the social work professionals describe the re-integration and how this might be influenced by the surrounding structural and environmental factors. Bryman (2016) points out that interpretivism and constructionism are the most natural stands in qualitative research, which is also the research method of this study.

According to Clarke and Braun (2016), the aim of thematic analysis is not merely to summarize the collected data, but to identify and interpret its most important features, guided by the research questions. This approach is helpful in identifying patterns within data as regards to "participants' lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices; 'experiential' research which seeks to understand what participants' think, feel, and do" (Clarke & Braun, 2016:297). By this procedure, thematic analysis emphasizes the production of an accurate and high-quality analysis (ibid) and justifies our decision of using this method when analyzing the data.

4.2. Work division between the researchers

During the process of conducting this study the workload between the two researchers has been equally divided. In order to make the process smoother, certain subchapters have been written by dividing them between the researchers. The whole text has been read through by both researchers and discussed together. In this way the researchers have worked tightly together throughout the research process and therefore, contributed to each chapter.[6]

4.3. Finding relevant literature

In order to create an adequate knowledge base for this study a number of different publications, reports, and other types of studies have been used. The "introduction", and "literature review" chapters are based on these sources. More specifically, seven UN and governmental publications, six peer-reviewed scientific articles, one book chapter, and ten reports/studies by researchers or anti-trafficking organizations have been used. Several databases were used to compile this material e.g. "Scopus", "Sociology Collection", "KVINNSAM", "Super Search" (Gothenburg University Library), "Google Scholar", and others. According to Bryman (2016), the search for literature should be guided by the research questions. Based on this assumption following search strings are examples of their usage in the literature search for this study:

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[6] For work division during the conduction of interviews, transcribing and analysis see 4.4.3, 4.5.1 and 4.5.3.

Human Trafficking OR Sex Trafficking AND Re-integration
Human Trafficking OR Sex Trafficking AND Romania
Sex Trafficking AND Romania OR South East Europe AND Re-integration
Constraining AND / OR Facilitating factors AND re-integration AND Trafficking Victims
Social Work AND Re-integration of Trafficking Victims

In order not to overlook relevant research, the titles and abstracts of all publications, that the search resulted in, were skimmed through. The next step of the literature analysis was narrowing down the remaining publications by reading them through. The literature that remained after the scrutiny became the knowledge base for the first and third chapters of this study.

4.4. Data collection

This section will present semi-structured in-depth interviews used as a data collection method, which is followed by a description of the sampling procedure and the conduction of the interviews.

4.4.1. Qualitative interviewing: Semi-structured in-depth interviews

For this study qualitative interviews have been conducted in the form of semi-structured in-depth interviews. Qualitative interviews have their foundation in an interest of the respondents' point of view (Bryman, 2016). They allow for an understanding of experiences and a reconstruction of events that the researcher did not participate in (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), which helps us as researchers to make sense of our data and answer our research questions. Moreover, the flexibility of this method will help extract what the respondents themselves find important by allowing and, even, encouraging them to talk freely and 'going off on a tangent' (Bryman, 2016).

According to Bryman (2016) in semi-structured interviews the researchers ask questions based on an interview guide - a prepared list of questions that ought to be covered. There is however room for flexibility and the questions do not have to be asked in the specific order that they are listed, and additional questions can be asked to follow up the respondents' replies (ibid). The interview guide, used in this study, included introductory questions and three main sections with sub-questions.[7] Semi-structured interviewing is, moreover, good to use in cases where the researchers are "beginning the investigation with a fairly clear focus" (Bryman, 2016:469) in order to be able to discuss more specific issues. In addition, this method is preferable when there is more than one person carrying out the interviews, as in the case of this research. In this way it is easier to ensure some comparability of interviewing style (ibid).

Furthermore, studies that are based on in-depth interviews can help understand people's work lives. This interview form has e.g. been used in research on social work professionals in order for them to "reconstruct stories of what happened to [their] clients" (ibid), which is one important aspect of this study.

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[7] For full interview guide see appendix 3.

4.4.2. Sampling process

To recruit participants for this study, *purposive sampling* was applied. This approach is a form of non-probability sampling, which means that the researcher is not trying to sample participants randomly. Instead, they are sampled strategically "with reference to the research questions, so that units of analysis are selected in terms of criteria that will allow the research questions to be answered" (Bryman, 2016:410).

The purposive sampling for this study has been done on two different levels. Firstly, a *sampling of context* was considered, where the physical location of the participants was outlined. This was followed by the next level; *sampling of participants,* which considers the individuals within the chosen context (Bryman, 2016). To be able to answer the research questions and the aim of this study, the context for the sample was agreed to be anti-trafficking organizations in Romania. The organization also had to provide some kind of re-integration services to victims of human trafficking. On the level of participants, we were looking for people employed in such an organization as defined in the level of context, who performed social work as their task. The social work practice should be partly or fully dedicated to re-integration services for the victims of human trafficking. Neither the number of years working in the field, nor whether the participant had a social work education or not were considered relevant for this study.

To summarize we sampled participants according to the following criteria:

1. Employed in a Romanian anti-trafficking organization providing re-integration services for victims of human trafficking.
2. Performs social work (re-integration services) within the organization.

Before contacting possible participants, we begun by mapping the Romanian anti-trafficking organizations that fit our criteria. At this stage we had advantage of our prior knowledge about Romania and the active organizations in the field, including contacts to many social workers that we had met during our placement period. Moreover, we were doing research on the Internet to find additional organizations that we did not priorly know of. When we had selected the organizations that fit our criteria, we sent them an email describing the aim of our study and encouraged interested participants to contact us. In the email, that was sent about one week before travelling to Romania, we attached an informational letter with more details and our contact information[8]. At this point two participants confirmed their participation and we could set a date for interviews. Yet another one asked us to contact the organization upon arrival in Romania to set a time and place for the interview.

Arriving to Romania we emailed the organizations who had not yet replied and reminded them about our study. When also these emails were not replied we decided to call the organizations. Contacting them through the phone seemed to be appreciated and all eagerly confirmed their participation immediately. Moreover, we believe calling the organizations facilitated the process of getting participants since most organizations had met us before and remembered us when we talked on the phone.

The final sample size comprised of eight participants who together represented five different organizations. The organizations are located in different cities and towns in the Central and Southern (including Bucharest- Ilfov) region of Romania. The age span was between approximately 30 and 60 years old, and both men and women were included in the sample. Regarding

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[8] See appendix 1

the educational background of the participants, four have a formal social work education, two are psychologists, and the remaining two have education from another field.[9] Some of the respondents have been working in the anti-trafficking field for almost 20 years while others have a few years of working experience with the target group. While they are all involved in the social work activities of their organization in one way or another, their functions differ. Examples of performed tasks are counselling, re-integration planning, and assisting their beneficiaries in daily life activities in the shelter. Accompanying the beneficiaries to trial and arranging different workshops or activities are other examples of the respondents' tasks. Furthermore, additional non-cliental work such as administration, financial reporting, and bookkeeping is common.

More detailed information about the participants (such as gender or names) are not disclosed on purpose, in order to protect their identity. Not providing this information was considered particularly important due to the fairly small-scaled anti-trafficking field in Romania.

4.4.3. Conducting the interviews

All interviews were conducted during February 2019 in Romania. The first step after confirming the participants, was to agree on a time and place for the interviews. In order to make the participants feel comfortable with the interview setting we asked them to choose the place for the interview. In all cases they asked us to conduct the interview in the organization's facilities (office or shelter).

The interviews, that were conducted in English, all started with us thanking the participants for taking part in our study. Thereafter, we explained the aim of our study and asked if any clarifications were needed. At this point we also described how we planned to store the collected data and guaranteed confidentiality. This was done according to the principle of promising that the identity of the respondent shall not be disclosed publicly (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This was followed by both the participants and us researchers signing a consent form. Before starting the interviews, we asked the participants if they would agree to being recorded, which they all agreed to. According to Kvale (2007), this is helpful for the researchers, since it enables them to "concentrate on the topic and dynamics of the interview" instead of taking notes (Kvale, 2007:94).

Each interview took about one hour and was conducted by both of the researchers. However, for each interview session one of us was responsible for guiding the interview and asking questions. The other one was taking notes, making sure the interview questions had been addressed and filled in when needed. This was done in order to have a better flow in the interviews and to have an equal labor division as researchers. An established interview guide was used as support to cover the relevant topics for the study. Although, the questions were structured in a specific order, they were not always asked in this way in favor of the participant's free telling.

At the end of the interview we gave the respondents the opportunity to ask questions and add further information. We also made sure to ask if they were interested in receiving a copy of the final version of the study by email. Finally, to show our gratitude to the participating respondents, we gave each one a box of chocolate.

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[9] Which will not be specified in order to ensure the respondents' anonymity.

Seven out of eight interviews were done in the form of semi-structured in-depth interview as following the procedure just described. However, one interview was agreed to be done in writing, after a misunderstanding regarding communication in English was discovered. This participant did not feel comfortable speaking English but asked to answer the same questions in written form. The participant agreed to being available to answer follow-up questions if there would be any, and we therefore agreed to proceed with the interview in this form. After receiving the written answers from the participant, a couple of follow-up questions emerged and were then asked via email.

By the last interview we could clearly see that no new data seemed to be generated. This implies that we had reached a point of saturation, which refers to the state when "new data no longer suggest new insights into an emergent theory or no longer suggest new dimensions of theoretical categories" (Bryman, 2016: 421).

4.5. Data Analysis

The following subsections will present the different steps done in processing and analyzing our data. This will be done by firstly discussing the transcribing procedure, followed by a presentation of our data analysis method: thematic analysis, and finally the data analysis procedure is presented.

4.5.1. Transcribing

The recorded audio files were transcribed within a couple of days after the interviews were conducted by using an intelligent verbatim transcription approach. Oliver et al., (2005) state that this method, also referred to as clear or denaturalized transcripts, aims to get a full and faithful transcription without putting emphasis on involuntary vocalization. Rather, "accuracy concerns the substance of the interview, that is, the meanings and perceptions created and shared during a conversation" (ibid:1277). Based on this approach we left out unnecessary data, such as repetition of words, laughter, pauses, and so on, but still left the language unmodified. By using this method, we aimed to transcribe what was being said in the interviews and not give room for our own interpretations at this stage. When listening to the audio tapes there were a few words that we could not properly hear. These we left out and replaced with [inaudible] or, when it was a Romanian word, with [Romanian word].

In order to ensure confidentiality of the participants, all information that could lead to revealing their identity, such as names and location of the organizations, should be taken away (MacLean et al., 2004), which was also done in this study. This has been done by replacing such information with e.g. [name of the respondent], [name of location], or [name of beneficiary]. The names of the participants were later changed to randomly picked pseudonyms. In order to not risk revealing the identity of the participants all chosen pseudonyms are female names. To work efficiently we divided the transcription of interviews equally between us. However, before starting the transcription procedure we read up on the verbatim transcription model and discussed it in order to make sure we had the same understanding of how to it should be applied.

4.5.2. Analyzing the data

When the transcribing phase was completed, the data, including both the written and oral interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis - which according to Bryman (2016) is one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis. The data collected through the written interview has been treated and analyzed the same way as the transcripts from the oral in-depth interviews.

Thematic analysis "is a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data" (Clarke & Braun, 2016:297). A thematic analysis can provide accessible and organized measures for generating codes and themes from the gathered data. The codes constitute the smallest units of the analysis and highlight the interesting aspects of data (potentially) relevant to the research questions. Codes can be seen as building blocks for the larger patterns of meaning, the themes, that "provide a framework for organizing and reporting the researcher's analytic observations" (ibid). According to Bryman (2016), one of the most common criteria for making sure that a pattern, within the interview transcripts, should be considered a theme, is the emphasis on repetition.

The first step of our analysis was to read through each transcript and highlighting the words and sentences that we found to be important for our research questions. Thereafter, we went through all transcripts and compared what we had highlighted. Mostly, we had marked the same words or sentences, but when this was not the case, we discussed them. In the following step we made a summary of each interview that also worked as a first draft of themes. Each summary followed the same structure and included the key topics discussed.

As the next step we created mind maps, where the themes and subthemes were established with specific codes. The mind maps were developed together after individually color-coding the printed summaries. Thereafter we compared them with each other. At this stage we also went back and forth to the transcripts. The main themes and subthemes that emerged in this phase are illustrated in the table below.

Table 1. Themes and sub themes

MAIN THEME	The women	Constraining factors of re-integration	Facilitating factors of re-integration	Working approach with the women	Consideration and challenges for the professionals
SUB-THEME	-Age -Socio-economic background -State on upon arrival -Experience in trafficking - Wishes and goals of the women	-Personal factors -External factors -Consequences of unsuccessful re-integration	-Personal resources -External resources	-The professional's role -Working approach with the women's family -Working with the women's resources -Re-integration services	-External challenges -Challenges related to the women as beneficiaries

4.6. Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are present in several steps in social research. In order to make informed decisions and understand the implications of one's choices, it is important for the researcher to be aware of the ethical issues involved with research (Bryman, 2016). Questions concerning the treatment of the people participating in research is a central part of research ethics. According to the Swedish Research Council (2017), research participants should be protected from harms and wrongs, connected to their participation, to the highest possible degree. Furthermore, the basis of all research ethics is formed by the researcher's own ethical responsibility, who therefore has the duty to ensure that the research is morally acceptable and of good quality (CODEX, 2019).

Bryman (2016) presents four main ethical principles for good research practice. These four areas concern; lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, harm of participant, and deception, which form a useful classification for the social research's ethical principles (ibid).

The Social Research Association's (2003) Ethical Guidelines state that participation in a research should be based on a freely given informed consent. Hence, participants should not have the impression of being required to participate in the study. According to Bryman (2016), the respondents need to be provided with as much information about the study as possible to make an informed decision about their participation. To keep the importance of this in mind in our study, an information letter about the research was sent to all possible participants when requesting interviews from the organizations. Moreover, the informed consent form was given to the respondents to read carefully through before starting the interviews. The participants' right to be aware of their rights to refuse and withdraw their consent at any stage, for any reason (ibid) was emphasized in the form. Before starting the interview, the participant's right to quit anytime, and the right to refuse answering any of the questions was repeated orally.

According to Bryman (2016), avoiding the invasion of privacy is another important principle of ethically sound research. Privacy is linked to the issues of anonymity and confidentiality, which should be highlighted during each step of the research process. It is important to keep the participants' personal information anonymous and confidential during the entire interview process, including when handling and storing the records (ibid). The important issues of anonymity and confidentiality[10] have been respected throughout the process, as one of the leading principles in this research. Any information about the participants was neither given to other participants nor to anyone else. This was however found challenging at times due to the "small circles" of the organizations in the field, and the fact that they were often in communication with each other. Keeping the interview material secured was taken into consideration, and it was thus guaranteed that the participants' personal information did not leak to anyone else.

According to Bryman (2016), avoiding causing any harm to the participants is the third principle in social research. He points out that the harm is hard to identify in all circumstances of qualitative research. Harm can be physical, developmental, or causing a loss of self-esteem or stress to the participants. It is also strongly linked to the importance of guaranteeing confidentiality during the research process. (ibid) The possible disturbance caused both to the participants themselves, and to their relationships with their environment should be minimized by the researcher (Social Research Association, 2003). In order to minimize any sort of harm to the participants caused by the research, the issue of confidentiality was strongly kept in mind throughout the research process. However, even though we as researchers paid special attention

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[10] Explained in more detail in chapters 4.4.3. and 4.5.1.

to assuring confidentiality regarding the participation, the respondents themselves may have told others in the team or in the field about their role in the study. For example, all of the respondents wanted to meet in their office, which made their participation more known within their organization.

The fourth principle, deception, refers to the case where the researcher presents the study as something else than it is in reality (Bryman, 2016). For our study, deception was avoided by offering information to the participants both orally and in written form. Throughout the research process it has been important for us to be as open as possible about the research aim and process. The collected data was also used exactly as agreed upon with the participants. We agreed to send this study report to each participant when finalized.

As researchers we also found it important to keep in mind the possible power relations in the interview setting. We were aware that e.g. being researchers put us in a somewhat superior position in relation to the participants. Letting the participants choose the location of the interview was one way of attempting to neutralize the possible power imbalances. As both of the researchers lack deeper, or very specific, Romanian cultural knowledge, and neither speaks or understands the Romanian language, some linguistic and cultural aspects might be left aside in the process of this study. The language barrier was kept in mind as a clear ethical consideration during the entire process, as English is neither our nor the participants' mother tongue. In order to make sure that we understood each other correctly in the interviews, we asked follow-up questions when needed and encouraged the participants to do the same.

4.7. Reliability and validity

Bryman (2016) states that reliability and validity are important criteria for assessing the quality of a study. Although these criteria are more often used to assess the quality of quantitative studies, they can also be used to assess the quality of qualitative studies. Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that the research generates through its findings. In relation to qualitative study design the concept is divided into internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the correspondence between the researchers' observations and the developed ideas. External validity refers to the generalization of the findings across different social settings. (ibid) According to Leung (2015), validity in qualitative research means the "appropriateness" of the tools, processes, and data, and furthermore their harmony and connectedness with each other and the desired outcome of the study. It is important to take into consideration that, as this study aims to explore the professionals' descriptions in particular, the research findings are related to the experiences of this specific sample group. If, on the other hand, for instance the women's' or their families' descriptions and perceptions of re-integration would have been in focus, the research findings would likely have had a different character.

According to Leung (2015), in quantitative research, reliability refers to exact replicability of the processes and the results. However, as in qualitative research such definition is challenging, the essence of reliability in the case of qualitative studies lies with consistency. In qualitative research a margin of variability for results is tolerated. Therefore, it is possible that a researcher can come up with data that is ontologically similar to a study executed the same way, but may however differ in richness and ambience within similar dimensions. (ibid) Hence, to assess the reliability of a qualitative study, we should look at whether the study is repeatable by using similar methodology. Researchers should always be able to provide proof of the credibility and

trustworthiness of their research, which are other criteria used to assess the quality of a qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). Thus, this methodology chapter presents the study process as clearly and transparently as possible and aims to make it possible for other researchers to verify the reliability of this study by recreating it and following a similar work process. Furthermore, to strengthen the reliability of this study, the documents used in the process can be found in the appendices.

In order to do high-quality work in a qualitative study, the researchers must be reflexive and conceptual throughout the process (Polit & Beck, 2010). This has been kept in mind when formulating the interview guide, and in the interview situations as well, in order to ask the right questions in the best possible way. It is important to also note, that in this thesis process the two researchers' own interpretations have been constantly questioned by the researchers themselves. From this perspective, it has been helpful to be two in this process instead of one. Our academic supervisor has also played an important role in the process of reflecting on the material, following the work process, and in understanding the collected data.

4.8. Generalization

Challenges regarding generalization are common for qualitative research, which does not necessarily aim to create generalizable data. Instead of generalizing, the goal of most qualitative studies is rather to "provide a rich, contextualized understanding of some aspect of human experience through the intensive study of particular cases" (Polit & Beck, 2010:2). A small scope of selective sampling where the respondents are not chosen to be representative of a population, or their views to be generalized, are typical characteristics of qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, this study's findings do not aim to be generalizable. The sample of respondents has not been restricted based on e.g. gender, age, years of working in the field, or the location of the organization, but simply based on the organizations' nature and characteristic of being an anti-trafficking organization in Romania.

The purpose of this study is not to compare the different views of the respondents, but merely to explore how the participants describe their own subjective experiences. Nevertheless, we believe that this study can be seen as an important contribution to the knowledge base of trafficking victims' re-integration in the Romanian context. This is e.g. supported by the fact that the sample includes participants representing five different anti-trafficking organizations in various parts of the country.

4.9. Choosing the topic and prior knowledge

Our personal motivation for the chosen topic of our thesis derives from the strong interest both of us have for the issue of human trafficking. Therefore, we both decided to focus on this topic throughout our Master's studies. The interest towards Romania specifically arose from the willingness to understand the underlying reasons behind the country's representation in statistics about trafficking victims. Later on, during the placement period of our Master's program, we had the opportunity to go to Romania and spend five weeks there with a local anti-trafficking organization. The time at the placement organization provided us with important knowledge and understanding about the human trafficking situation in the country, and an increasing interest in understanding the local anti-trafficking organizations' work. We soon understood that the re-integration of former trafficking victims is a crucial but also complex part of the work performed by the professionals in the field.

By talking to the professionals in several anti-trafficking organizations, as well as the young women who had been trafficked, our interest in digging deeper into what re-integration actually meant grew stronger. What makes it easier for these young girls and women that we met to re-integrate? What makes it harder? How are these conditions related to the specific context of Romania? What role do the social work professionals play in this process? These were questions that we started thinking about, and that later led to the concrete idea of making them into the research topic of our thesis. This was of course facilitated by us now having background knowledge about the Romanian context and the human trafficking situation, as well as contacts in the local anti-trafficking field.

Prior knowledge about the studied area has its pros and cons. Formerly established contacts, together with contextual or cultural understanding developed previously, can be helpful in the research process. However, prior knowledge can also have an effect on the researcher's views and cause biases about the results (Thurén, 2007). For us prior knowledge about the cultural context of the issue of trafficking helped us understand what the respondents were actually talking about and referring to. The cultural knowledge gained during the placement period was also an important facilitator in organizing the interviews, building up the trust with the organizations, and traveling within the country. However, we were also aware of the possible negative impacts of our prior knowledge in terms of leading our thoughts too much and creating preconceptions. Therefore, we kept this possibility on our mind and observed our actions in relation to this during the data collection and data analysis.

5. Findings

This chapter presents the findings from this study. In the first subchapter, the first research question of this study is considered. It accounts for the social work professionals' descriptions of successful re-integration of trafficking victims, as well as important background information about the women and the organizations. The following subchapter is related to the second research question and displays the constraining and facilitating factors for re-integration from the perspective of the professionals. The final subchapter is connected to the third research question and shows how the professionals view their own role in the re-integration process.

5.1. The organizations and the young women

In order to understand the professionals' descriptions of successful re-integration and the whole process, it is essential to firstly understand which the organizations, that the professionals represent, are, and secondly who the women arriving to the organizations actually are and how they get there. Therefore, this section accounts for the organizations, the backgrounds of these young women and their experiences of trafficking. Moreover, this section provides a description of how the arrival to the organization takes place, as well as what the women's general state upon arriving is. Thereafter, the young women's wishes and goals, and how these are related to their re-integration process, will be described from the perspective of the professionals. Finally, the professionals' description of successful re-integration is presented.

5.1.1. The anti-trafficking organizations

The five non-governmental organizations, represented by the interviewed professionals, are all doing anti-trafficking work and provide assistance services directly to trafficking victims. Some of them work only with victims of human trafficking while others also assist women in prostitution, who are not trafficked, and victims of intimate partner violence. All organizations have a shelter or a safe house where accommodation can be offered to beneficiaries in need of this. While some of the organizations only work with minors, others work exclusively with adults or with both age groups. The work teams are relatively small and, in most cases, consist of less than ten professionals. Despite the small teams most organizations have multidisciplinary teams with several professions represented, such as social workers and psychologists. Although some of the organizations have a more structured re-integration program than others, all do provide specific re-integration activities. These are above all social, legal, medical, educational, material assistance, as well as psychological assistance or therapy.

5.1.2. Backgrounds of the young women

The age of the young women arriving to the organizations range from 11 to 30 years and above. However, in general the professionals describe them as young. Young adults and minors are the most common age group among the assisted. In all organizations one trend is obvious - the assisted women are getting younger and younger.

When it comes to the socio-economic backgrounds of the young women two major findings can be pointed out. Firstly, a general pattern is that they originate from very poor families, often from rural communities. Secondly, these women often lack education. On the other hand, a change in this pattern has been experienced by some of the professionals who explain how these young women are now also coming from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and how they are not all uneducated:

> *"But now in our days the victims are coming from economically medium to average family background. And with school, -with high school. So, the victims are not anymore, those victims - illiterate and very, very poor as back in 1999." (Ana)*

The characteristics of the young women's family backgrounds are highlighted by the majority of the professionals as a common feature. Many of the girls and women that are assisted by the organizations share a history of rough childhoods with abusive families. This commonly seen phenomenon is described as follows:

> *"All of them come from very broken families or [...] families that were not very implicated in the girls' lives." (Mihaela)*

Furthermore, the professionals point out that a significant number of the young women have been raised in institutions, orphanages, or child protection facilities. On this note, the professionals explain how a broken family background is many times connected to a lack of experiencing emotional support or attachment as a child. This is a common background among the assisted women according to the professionals.

5.1.3. Experiences of trafficking

The social work professionals have different perceptions of where the young women have been trafficked prior to arriving to the organization. While some professionals assist women where the majority have been victims of internal trafficking[11], others have experienced that most women in their assistance have been trafficked abroad, and some help victims of both types of trafficking. One pattern, pointed out by the professionals, is that many times the women have been exploited in trafficking both in Romania and as well as abroad. In which case the internal trafficking often occurs prior to being trafficked abroad. This is sometimes used as a strategy by the traffickers, as the girls, mostly minors, are "trained" before being trafficked abroad, as one professional explained this problematic phenomenon:

> *"Now while being minors they are trained in Romania. And that's the biggest problem because, [...] let's say that they start at 11[...] years old until 18, they have seven years of working in prostitution and then when they're 18 they come to Sweden, Denmark, Nordic countries, Austria, Europe - all over." (Maria)*

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[11] Trafficked within one's country of origin, in this case Romania.

The professionals distinguish a clear pattern regarding how most of the young women have been recruited into trafficking, namely through the "Loverboy Method". The act of recruitment itself many times takes place over the Internet. The school environment is another place of recruitment, especially for the youngest women who often are minors.

5.1.4. Arriving to the organizations' assistance

Depending on how and where the young women have been trafficked, the procedure of arriving to the assistance providers differ. First, the women are identified as victims of trafficking in either Romania or abroad. This identification can be done e.g. by IOM or the police. Both national and international actors should notify ANITP, when a victim is identified, who will thereafter assist in the referral to the local anti-trafficking organization. In some cases, the victims are referred to the organization directly by an anti-trafficking organization in the country where they were trafficked to or by the local police. In cases where the organization has the authority to work with minors, they can be referred directly by the Romanian Child Protection Department. The referral to the anti-trafficking organization is activated when the women have agreed to be assisted and take part in a re-integration program.

For the ones that have been trafficked abroad the referral processes include assisted return to Romania, generally through IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Program. Some of the women also return to Romania unassisted and seek support only when arriving home. It is also important to point out that the return is not always voluntary as in some cases the women have been forced to leave the country where they were trafficked to, due to their legal status there. However, in most cases the women arrive to Romania with an assigned repatriation or re-integration budget through the AVRR program. When not repatriated, e.g. in the cases of victims of internal trafficking, the women are normally assigned some kind of individual re-integration budget by the assisting organization.

5.1.5. State upon arrival

The mental and physical state of the young women, as described by the professionals, is many times precarious when the women first arrive to the organization's assistance program. This is illustrated for example by the following excerpt:

> *"Most of the girls that are coming to the safe house, they are really destroyed. No one will come here in a good mood, happy, or having all they need. When they are coming here, they are really hopeless, with a lot of pain in their soul. Tired. [...] They're coming here when they are really in a bad situation." (Lucia)*

It is pointed out that many of the women are traumatized from a very young age and that they often have psychological traumas related to the trafficking experience. In addition to psychological traumas, these young women sometimes have physical injuries when they first access the post-trafficking services. Many arrive with very low self-esteem and a tendency to not trust their surroundings. Some women express or indicate that they are afraid of men and do not want to have any relationship with a man in an early stage of the re-integration process. Furthermore, some find it hard to trust the social work professional's intention and ability to help them.

5.1.6. Wishes and goals of the young women

Many of the young women have clear ideas of what they wish for themselves in their lives already when arriving to the organization's assistance. For some of the women these ideas and goals are generated throughout the re-integration process. However, according to the professionals it is also common that the women do not know what to wish for themselves in life as narrated below:

> *"They don't have perspectives for their future. They don't know what to ask for. They don't know what to see in the future [...]. And they really need help to plan, and for us to help them to listen to themselves, and to see in themselves what they really need to do." (Lucia)*

The professionals emphasize that every woman's wishes, and future goals are individual. Nevertheless, the most common wishes of these young women, according to the experience of the professionals, are either linked to material needs or emotional needs. Associated with the first pattern, of wishes related to material needs, becoming independent and finding a job is one often expressed wish and goal for the women. Also, to finish interrupted studies, or to initiate them in the first place is many times an aspiration for the women. Having a job gives them the ability to provide for themselves and their families, which also sometimes includes their own children. Education is also seen as a way of enhancing a stable job situation. Independency can furthermore also be linked to the wish of owning property such as a house and having money of their own. These views are illustrated by one of the workers below:

> *"Very different [wishes], but majority of them want to be able to provide, to take care of themselves and provide support for the family and children. Or to have their children with them" (Ana)*

Another wish, that the professionals hear the women expressing often, is that of moving abroad. This is especially frequent among the ones who were once trafficked abroad. The professionals explain how this wish often originates from the women's experiences of seeing life outside Romania and from them gaining understanding about how their living conditions could improve if they were to live abroad again. This often-occurring dream of the women is explained by one of the professionals as follows:

> *"Most of them want to go abroad and to work there. They have this mirage of European countries as richer than Romania and with better salary*
> *[...] and with higher life standards. "(Elena)*

The second pattern of the women's wishes, and goals are according to the professionals related to emotional needs and are often related to love, care and affection; the human needs that many of them have not experienced before but are natural to long for. The women often express to the professionals how they desire to be loved and to be able to love someone. This can in turn be linked to the often-declared wish of having their own family, a partner, and children. In cases where the women have children who are taken into state care, regaining custody of them is a

typically expressed wish. To be able to care for one's own children can, according to the professionals, be connected to the wish of gaining independence in life.

Sometimes the professionals have a feeling that a woman's wish to become a mother is in some cases actually deeply rooted in being able to compensate for their own rough childhood. This compensation becomes evident to the professionals through the women's strong need to provide the child everything that they themselves were lacking. Moreover, the professionals sometimes feel that these young women believe that having a child means having someone to love them.

Connecting love to only romantic relationships is also common, which, according to the professionals is a reason for many of the women to look for love in men. Especially in the case of minors, big steps in starting a relationship or a family are sometimes taken in a hurry. The professionals explain how these decisions can also be linked to traditional Romanian values and the common ideas of how one should be as a woman. This is narrated by one of the professionals as follows:

> "To be completed as a woman, you need to be a wife [...] this is their dream: to have children, to have a family, to have a husband that loves them." (Andreea)

5.1.7. The professionals' descriptions of successful re-integration

All the professionals have experienced re-integration cases that they describe as successful. Many times, they are contacted by the women who have left the re-integration assistance telling tell them that they are fine and that they have reached their goals in life. This is expressed by many professionals as a way of measuring the successfulness of a case, where the women have not necessarily been fully re-integrated when leaving the organization. Rather, it is described as good proof of them being in a stable and non-vulnerable situation, also when they are no longer supported by the professionals.

The professionals point out that what is considered a successful outcome depends on the specific case and what the woman is aiming for. However, there are certain patterns related to the cases that are described as successful. The first and most strongly highlighted one being when the woman has reached financial security by finding a job and is able to provide for herself and possible family members. This stable economy was in some situations also related to the second pattern of secure housing opportunities such as the possibility to buy a house. A third pattern was related to the young women finishing their education. Fourthly, the professionals described successful re-integration cases as being related to healthy relationships, such as if the woman got married, got a child, or was re-integrated into their childhood families. Lastly, the cases where the women have gained legal justice, in relation to them being victims of human trafficking, were sometimes pointed out as successful situations. One of the professionals describe a successful case that she recalls below:

> "We helped this girl to do a nail school, and to find a job. She also did an evening course to finish her studies. Her child has been entrusted to a special kindergarten [...]. When the woman came to us, her trial was over, the trafficker is in prison and she could stay in her apartment [...] without fear of being sought after by the traffickers." (Iulia)

Sometimes the challenging situations are found to bring great outcomes and lead to the women being successfully re-integrated. This is illustrated in the description of a case that one of the professionals has worked with:

> "She was coming to the program in total depression, six months pregnant [...]. And now she's together with her family and with the [baby] boy. And she is a very good mother. [...] Now she's doing hairdressing and she is working in a kind of factory. [...] And she looks happy. For me it's a big, big success. (Andreea)

The professionals point out that the women's individual wishes and goals for their future are connected to the successfulness of their re-integration. The final goal of the re-integration process, as described by the professionals, is based on each woman's individual aspirations of where she wants to go, what she wants to do, or who she wants to become. What the professionals want to highlight here is that, even though there are important foundations for re-integration, such as for the women to be in a stable, secure, and non-vulnerable state, this alone does not define successful re-integration. In the end this is always guided by what the women themselves consider as successful regarding their lives.

5.2. Influencing factors on re-integration

In this section the professionals' descriptions of their experiences of which factors constrain or facilitate the young women's re-integration process will be presented.

5.2.1. Constraining factors

While the facilitating factors of re-integration are presented later on, this section will describe what elements can constrain the process.

5.2.1.1. Personal situations and capacities of the women

It has been discussed earlier that women raised in families, and those who have experienced love and emotional attachment in their childhood are more successfully re-integrating into Romanian society. The ones that on the other hand have not been raised in a family, but in an orphanage or institution, and who have not experienced emotional attachment, seem to have a harder time progressing in this phase. Furthermore, the women who do not have family support throughout the process can find it more challenging to find their strength and motivation to proceed. Professionals have also experienced that the length of the trafficking period as well as the age of the women, when first trafficked, plays a huge role in their re-integration. This is described below:

> "The younger the girl, the more damaged...changes are very difficult to make for their future. And if the [trafficking] period [...]is longer, it's very difficult." (Elena)

The professionals pointed out that having formal, as well as informal education, and life skills can be important contributors to the re-integration phase. If the young women, on the other hand, lack education this can become a challenge and the social work professionals have to put a lot work into assisting the re-integration. The women who have low levels of formal education can also have a harder time finding and keeping a job. For the ones that lack work experience this can result in having a hard time following a schedule and the rules of the workplace. Furthermore, women with mental issues, drug addictions, or other medical conditions related to the trafficking period, such as HIV, are more likely to find themselves having a hard time re-integrating.

If the woman is not motivated for the hard work that the re-integration process can imply, this can constrain the procedure according to the experience of the professionals. The lack of motivation can e.g. be explained by the fact that she is lacking perspective regarding the future and finds it hard to know what to wish for, or that she cannot see anything positive in her life. Moreover, the professionals have seen that when these young women are not committed to, prepared for, or even are afraid of the change and work that comes with the re-integration process, this can become yet another constraining factor.

The social work professionals have noticed that a huge constraint on the re-integration process is when the young woman has a difficulty to adapt to a "normal life" outside institutions or a trafficking/prostitution situation. The "normal" for her is not necessarily the "normal" for others and vice versa. The professionals explain how the women who are raised in institutions learn one lifestyle back in the orphanage and are often unable to adapt to another lifestyle with rules. This phenomenon was pointed out to be very common among the young women participating in the re-integration programs.

Moreover, the professionals explain that many of these women got used to living day by day during the period of exploitation, which can complicate adapting to having a long-term plan for the future. Many of the women also find it hard to change the life that they have been affected by and been forced to adapt to. These challenges are explained by two of the professionals as follows:

> *"There were many years when they just learned and got used to live for the day, and to be happy with what they receive at the end of the day. And they don't have a long-term perspective." (Lucia)*

> *"That's the bare bearings they have, the life they know, how they adapted to that, being trafficked, and constantly being with traffickers and men, and being abused. And that's the only world they know, and they know how to act there [...]. And then you take them out of that environment into a whole new environment, -they don't know what to do." (Gabriela)*

The young women who want to move abroad can sometimes have a harder time re-integrating in Romania since their focus is elsewhere. It has been noticed by the professionals that the women often do not know what is expected of them when moving abroad, and thus go unprepared. This can lead to a different situation than they hoped for.

5.2.1.2. Social context

In Romania it is very common for sex trafficking victims to face strong stigma due to their history of sexual exploitation and hence association with prostitution. The stigma exists on all levels of society and can therefore in many ways constrain these women's re-integration process. The strong influence of stigma in the present-day Romanian society is narrated by the professionals below:

> *"I think the society as a whole just kind of blames the girl. Everyone blames the girl."* *(Gabriela)*

> *"The stigma is still here with us in Romania. This is a very long process to change people, ideas and mentality. It's about education. In a small town or a village, they [the women] are like black sheep of the community." (Ana)*

The professionals further explain how on a societal level, especially in smaller communities, stigma can be very present in the young women's daily life, if the history of exploitation has been revealed. Sometimes the stigma, related specifically to the background of being trafficked, can even affect the women's work opportunities and limit their chances of entering the labor market due to e.g. the employers' prejudices. This therefore constrains their re-integration opportunities and maintains their vulnerability, as is described below:

> *"In other communities, more isolated [...], it's very hard for them. From the very beginning we know [...] that there are not the same chances for the women victims of trafficking to do something professionally in their small communities." (Andreea)*

In some cases, also the families of the women can suffer from stigma as a result of their exploitation in the sex industry being disclosed. This can lead to the whole family being isolated and in risk of becoming victims of various other crimes due their association with the stigma. Again, this is pointed out as more common in communities than in cities. Moreover, these young women sometimes face stigmatization and rejection from their own family when they aim to return home after the trafficking period as illustrated below:

> *"There are situations when a family reject the girl and don't want her home because it's considered a very big shame." (Elena)*

According to the professionals, stigma related to sex trafficking can be connected to a lack of knowledge about the issues and the mechanisms around them. In Romania this can also sometimes be seen in the legal system where judges many times do not put much effort into trafficking cases, or even drop a case due to their lack of expertise in the issue. The professionals point out that there also seems to be a lack of knowledge regarding the mechanisms related to trafficking, such as how the "Loverboy Method" works, as described by one professional below:

> *"And lot of the times the judge will be like that. Just shocked that the girl still loves the guy. Suddenly it's not a court case anymore. It's a doubt in the mind of the judge.*

'Should I convict this guy? This girl is so dumb and still loves him. What really happened?'." (Gabriela)

In the professionals' opinion, the shortcomings in prioritizing the issue of human trafficking has resulted in a society that does not offer enough support for the victims. There is for example a lack of state-provided programs aiming to help the target group, at the same time as the organizations are not receiving sufficient funds. The lack of funds leads to shortage of staff, and lack of anti-trafficking organizations in general in Romania, which can directly affect the trafficking victims' chances of re-integration. The donors, funding the organizations, often establish specific preconditions for how the young women should use the individual budgets targeted for them. It could e.g. be so that a certain pre-established amount should go to housing and another to medical care. This becomes tricky in the cases where the requirements do not match the women's needs. Hence, it is not always beneficial for the women, since they might need a bigger amount on housing, and nothing at all on medical care. In this way the donors' requirements can directly affect the person's re-integration chances.

The access to justice can be a huge step in the process of moving on and finally re-integrating into Romanian society. However, these judicial processes often take a long time, even years. This can have a damaging effect on the women's wellbeing, since they can still feel that they are somehow connected to the trafficking experiences due to the ongoing legal process. This is described in the excerpt below:

> *"The trial can be seven years in some cases, and they are all the time linked psychologically and emotionally with what happened in the trial. How to speak about their re-integration? Because, let's say our program is closed somehow, but they continue with the legal procedures many years."* (Andreea)

Another negative scenario connected to the legal processes is when they lead to, the fairly common outcome of no sentences for the accused trafficker(s). The young women often lack the right kind of assistance or protection in court and the traffickers can easily bribe or scare the women into withdrawing their testimonies. This can have a negative effect on the women who have already gone through many hardships in their lives. The injustice experienced during the legal process can for example negatively affect their recovery and self-image, as explained below:

> *"If you don't have a justice and you don't know the justice system. What chances do they have to recovery? They obviously blame themselves and they go to court and see that nothing happens, and they have even more reasons to blame themselves."* (Gabriela)

The professionals describe that yet another challenge on a societal level is the difficulty for the women to access long-term housing due to high rents. This unsure housing situation can once more place the women in a vulnerable state. Moreover, the school environment can sometimes involve a risk for the ones that are attending educational programs. The clearest obstacle mentioned is the presence of traffickers in the schools and its surroundings trying to recruit the young women into trafficking, putting them in risk of re-trafficking. This issue is severe and not properly addressed as the excerpts below shows:

"They're constantly in schools and nobody is doing anything about it. And they're a familiar face. The girls, they get used to them. They might not be enrolled in school, but you see them in the courtyard every day. You get used to them". (Gabriela)

"And a lot of times in schools, there are lot of bad people coming, they sell drugs, or they try to recruit vulnerable girls, [...] I mean, she's vulnerable. She's been trafficked. And these guys come looking. They're always the nice guys. [...] And they will fall for that. A lot of them get tricked again." (Gabriela)

Another pattern the professionals can see among the girls, who are still minors, is their lacking ability to handle studying in the public-school system, since it becomes too stressful for them. This can lead to them running away on their way to or from school and end up in exploitative circumstances again.

5.2.1.3. Consequences of unsuccessful re-integration

The professionals' views are very converging when discussing the consequences of unsuccessful re-integration. The foremost risk and consequence of re-integration not going well, or being interrupted, is undoubtedly that the women end up getting re-trafficked. Also, re-exploitation in other forms as well as entering prostitution are connected to unsuccessful re-integration. Ending up in these conditions is expressed to be fairly common, especially if the women lack resources that facilitate their recovery. This common case of re-trafficking is illustrated below by one of the professionals:

"After some time, we discovered that she was taken to another network of human trafficking. Now we are trying to entirely recover her again. [...] Some of them rush to have a new lover hoping to find a true love. But again, they are deluded, and they enter into a new trafficking net." (Iulia)

Ending up in abusive relationships is viewed as another consequence and risk of the re-integration not being successful. According to the professionals, the vulnerable state many of the young women are in, easily makes them magnets to men who are in a position to abuse them.

5.2.2. Facilitating factors

The social work professionals point out several factors in the women's lives that play an important role in the re-integration phase. In this section these different components will be presented.

5.2.2.1. The individual situations, characteristics and capacities of the women

Understanding how the young women's characteristics and capacities affect the chances of re-integrating is important. The professionals experience that the women's attitude and mindset towards being in the re-integration program plays a key role. Being participative and co-operative is seen as a crucial starting point. Moreover, if the young women are open to the process of re-integration, and what it implies, this will make a good foundation for building a life with new possibilities. Also, having will and ambition to change their situation, and regaining trust in themselves are important. This goes together with being motivated, which most professionals perceive as a significant facilitating factor when re-integrating into the Romanian society. In addition, feeling hopeful can be helpful in the process, as explained by one professional in the following quote:

> *"Hope. Their own hope that they can be better. Or that they can do better. Hope and will. I know it sounds somehow cliché. It is a cliché [...] But the thing is; it starts from the inside." (Mihaela)*

When these young women find strength and courage to tackle the hard situation they have gone through, and to move on, this will contribute to building up the life they wish for themselves. This inner drive is described by several of the professionals e.g. as in the excerpts below:

> *"It's resilience, the personal asset is the resilience. They are used to resist the evil." (Maria)*

> *"It's really power in them and courage that they have. And if they will use this in a good way, this will be a big change in their life." (Elena)*

In addition, professionals often experience that the women, who have plans for their future, are more likely to have positive re-integration outcomes. To have this long-term perspective can help them stay motivated and remind them of what they are fighting for. One professional's reflections on this matter are presented below:

> *"To have plans for the future, -this is very important for them [...]. Because this is just a period of time, a transition. But life is not this, life is after [...]. And those who have plans, have more chances to succeed." (Elena)*

In relation to the importance of the family situation, many professionals have seen a pattern regarding the young women's childhood. Their experiences have shown that the women who

have grown up in families, cope and do better in the re-integration process in general, as evident in the excerpt below:

> *"What I've noticed is if girls come from families, they're much easier to work with and they do much better in everything [...]. The girls that come from social services, like child protection they're much, much more difficult to work with." (Gabriela)*

As presented earlier, the social work professionals often meet young women who lack the experience of emotional attachment from their childhood. The ones who, on the other hand, do have this kind of attachment or experience of love in their childhood seem to have better chances of re-integrating. Here it is important to note that this kind of love must not necessarily have been experienced in a family environment as explained by one of the professionals:

> *"Most of the times, even the girls that come from child protection, the girls that are successful always had a person that loves them. Even if it was the lady that clean [...] the orphanage, maybe she just spent 10 minutes each day just hanging out with that specific girl and spending time with her. And those have always been the successful cases." (Gabriela)*

The importance of the young women's educational background is not only a possible constraining factor, as discussed earlier, but also a facilitating element. Seemingly, the women's education plays a role in how easy it will be for them to cope in the re-integration process. Regarding this point it is underlined by some professionals that the most important education in this context is not always the formal one, but the informal. The professionals state that many wrongly perceive education to only represent academic merits. However, informal education transmitted in e.g. a family environment can teach a person important things about how to handle life situations. This can even be seen as more important than formal education for the young women when it comes to providing tools of coping and confronting challenges in the post-trafficking phase. These views are reflected upon in the following excerpt:

> *"Personal resources. Yeah, it's the background of [having], not scholarship but education. [...] a lot of people are confusing scholarship - years in the school with education. And education means other things around you [...], education to be able to do things and to decide things [...]To decide for something and step by step to become independent [...]." (Andreea)*

5.2.2.2. Social context and support mechanisms

Equally important to the role of the women's personal characteristics, is the understanding of the external resources such as support networks. The most highlighted external resource, and element facilitating the re-integration, seems to be healthy family relations. External support mechanisms and social networks in general seem to be crucial facilitating factors, however, family support is clearly described as the most important one.

Here it is important to highlight that not only nuclear families are considered family, but also extended family. Furthermore, women who start their own families have a smoother re-integration through the attachment the family implies. Hence, the importance does not lie in who the family member is, but rather in that the relationship is healthy, and the women are supported throughout, as well as after the re-integration period. Family is considered to be able to provide the kind of emotional support and love that cannot be replaced by someone else, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

> *"Family.. it doesn't matter if it's a husband, if it's a mother, a father, an uncle or someone from the [extended] family; a grandmother, a grandfather. It's very important to have someone that love them. Love means love [in this case] in the family way." (Andreea)*

The experiences of the professionals show that the more active and involved the family member is in the re-integration process, the more successful results can be seen. However, family members are not the only important external support network for the young women. Also, the significance of having friends or colleagues as support resources is highlighted by the professionals and expressed as follows by one of them:

> *"Having someone very close to you being there for you, - even a friend is very important. Because you have someone to talk to. And you are not feeling alone in the world as some others feel." (Mihaela)*

It was also emphasized by the professionals how much support the young women can offer each other while being in the assistance of an organization together as beneficiaries. Regarding this one of the professionals states the following:

> *"Other victims they are a very good resource [...]. Victims that are in another stage of the program - they are amazing. How much support they can provide to the new entries." (Andreea)*

The professionals describe the organizations' and their volunteers' provided support, being a paramount resource and support element for the women. The shelter is described as one of the resources in the re-integration of the women because of the feeling of security it gives to the young women. For the women to have a role model, someone who can show them a good example that they can follow, is described to be important. Due to the history of exploitation in trafficking, good examples of men are also described to be helpful in the recovery process. Likewise, the importance of school as an external actor and support mechanism is highlighted. The church is also brought up as a good external resource for many of the women.

Moreover, the professionals underline another important facilitating element, which is for the young women to get the proper time to go through the healing process and to get the support they need during this time. The professionals explain how the healing process where they can ensure adequate time and resources, is the one that works the best. Moreover, the professionals

describe it to be necessary for themselves to be persistent and patient in their work in order for the re-integration to be successful.

Reaching financial security is, by the professionals, expressed as one of the main goals of the re-integration assistance offered by the organizations. The reason for this is that the professionals have learned that this is the most efficient way for the women to not end up in a vulnerable state again. Financial security can be reached through e.g. a job and a stable income, a stable accommodation, or access to land, depending on each individual situation. Therefore, economic stability can be considered to be one of the crucial facilitating factors as well as goals of the re-integration process. As discussed earlier, the judicial process often takes a long time. However, when the young women manage to gain legal justice in relation to the crime, that they have been the victim of, it can be a huge factor in helping them move on, and to re-integrate better. As narrated below, this element is even one of the most powerful ones in the recovery process according to one of the professionals:

> *"When they see justice done in court, I've seen a massive change in their recovery. That was the biggest change I personally saw." (Gabriela)*

In their work with the young women, the professionals have seen that taking part in trials can also give the women a sense of power, since they can contribute to a change affecting not only themselves. Giving their testimonies can make them feel like they take part in ending the misery of other women, who are, or would end up, in the hands of the same traffickers who exploited them. This experience is illustrated by the excerpt below:

> *"When they take part in a trial as witnesses or victims, they feel that they can stop something so that those people cannot do more harm for other women. So, they are feeling powerful that their testimony can change something. This legal part [...] is very, very important." (Ana)*

5.3. Social work professionals' role and working approach

This section will present the professionals role in the young women's re-integration and the working approached applied in this process. Lastly the considerations and challenges the professionals face in their work will be introduced.

5.3.1. The professional's role in the re-integration process

There is a clear pattern regarding how the social work professionals see their role in the young women's re-integration process. While the professionals see their role as important in the women's re-integration, they clearly state that the women themselves are the main actors in the process. Hence, the role of the professionals is seen as complementary aiming to support the women in reaching their personal goals of the re-integration and not to make decisions for them. This way of perceiving the women as the main actors in the process is clearly demonstrated in the excerpt below:

> *"All those successful re-integrations are thanks to them [...]. Of course, in point they are broken. [...]. But they are the main actors. Without their willing to survive, without their willing to fight, without their willing to be healthy, and to learn, and to go to work, -we [the professionals] are nothing." (Ana)*

The social work professionals describe that their role is to guide, support, help, and motivate the young women in their re-integration. Through their assistance the professionals aim to strengthen the women's own coping mechanisms and provide them psychological tools that can support the women in their process. Furthermore, they describe that they try to provide love and acceptance to the women without judging them because of their past experiences and choices. This principle is important especially in the case of minors, when the professionals also aim to provide them with a home-like environment to live in. In addition, the professionals also describe their own purpose in the process to be role models for the women, and to help guide them towards a different kind of life than what they were coerced to during the trafficking period.

The professionals explain how they sometimes, or even continuously, have differing views about what would be good and appropriate steps in the women's re-integration process compared to the women's own perceptions. One example of such a situation is when a woman, that the professional believe is not ready for it (due to e.g. health status), wants to find a job shortly after entering the program. Another example is when the women want to contact their families even though the professional does not view it as a good idea considering e.g. the safety aspects. Nonetheless, the differing views are not considered important, since the main actor in her own process is always the woman herself. Hence what the professional might consider the best for the women is not necessarily the best for them, as one professional states below:

> *"My good it's not your good. Please respect that all the time. I really don't know better what is good for you. It's impossible." (Andreea)*

The women's own resources such as social support resources, skills and capacities are very important, and are seen even as the most crucial tools in, and even the foundation for the professionals' work. Methods such as finding and mapping every woman's own individual skills and networks are used in working with the women's resources. In the following excerpts the professionals reflect on the value of personal resources:

> "I think everyone, has very strong individual resource [...] I really believe that, because it's our job to see those things and to work with those things." (Andreea)

> "It's [the woman's resources] a base to start any construction in your foundation. When [there is] someone that's been loved and shown affection to, you can continue [to work] with that and help her grow. [...] If they ever receive our input, that's the start. That's something to work with." (Gabriela)

Finding role models in the young women's lives, helping in rebuilding their relationships, and offering platforms to create social networks are other examples of useful methods that the social work professionals apply in their work. Sometimes, for the women to be able to build up their social networks and strengthen their social skills, the professionals try to connect them with people that the organization trusts in, such as volunteers or other partners.

5.3.2. Working approach of the professionals

> "It's her plan not mine." (Elena)

Working together with the women and actively involving them in their own re-integration processes is described as utterly important. The assistance is described to be offered in a such way that the women are encouraged to make their own decisions. As clearly expressed below, this involves viewing the women as capable and strong human beings, who can choose for themselves:

> "We are trying not to allow others to decide for the person and to speak for the person because the person can speak. And we really believe that." (Andreea)

> "You [the young woman] should do the change. I am not the one who is changing your life. You are changing your life. I am here just to help you." (Lucia)

Treating and viewing the women as unique individuals is described to be important to the professionals. This approach includes the assistance being based on the women's individual needs. Working methods, such as case management, are used to put this approach into practice. The idea is to be able to respond to the person's needs by working on the level of each individual, as illustrated below:

> "Each victim is treated like one project. Individual needs - individual projects." (Ana)

The professionals explain how they find strengthening, supporting, and empowering approaches very important to apply in their working methods. The assistance provided, is aiming to strengthen the young women's self-trust and gut feeling as well as helping them become more aware of their own capabilities. One other very important approach for the professionals is to believe that everyone has skills and talents, and the ability to find their ambition when being supported with this. As narrated below, the professionals also work on making the women feel like they can protect themselves, and thus enhance independence:

> *"We work with counselling to empower them to protect themselves. Not to be protected by others. We are working with others too, but we are focused on empowering the person to protect themselves." (Andreea)*

As the professionals claim to highly value the women's own decisions, participating in the organization's activities is always voluntary. This approach also applies to welcoming the women back to the program even after dropping out, which is a very important principle for the professionals, as illustrated below:

> *"They must know that we are there and that we accept them again and they can call us at any time." (Iulia)*

Providing the women an atmosphere of safety and security, both in the shelter and in the community, is important for the professionals. This includes assuring the women's psychological stability and ability to confront the upcoming re-integration phase through counselling and other kinds of support, as well as assuring their physical security by assessing the risks and providing them a secure place to stay if needed. Providing security is seen as the first step before other re-integration activities can be progressed. Security is also experienced as crucial for the professionals to take into consideration in order to stabilize the possible crisis situation.

5.3.3. Working with the young women's families

As already presented the social work professionals strongly highlight the importance of the women's' families in the re-integration process. Even if some of them find the cooperation with families challenging, and the ways to cooperate with them vary a lot, the role of the family is seen as important. Some of the professionals clearly express having methods for working with families such as family counselling, when on the contrary, some say that they do not necessarily work with them at all. Many professionals see family as a huge resource and put a lot of effort into empowering the families to support the young women in their recovery process. Furthermore, the professionals narrate how the family can provide support that cannot be replaced by the organizations, as exemplified below:

> *"We try to work with their family too because plus it's support, it's necessary and will be easier for us to integrate her. Because we cannot supply family protection and affection need. They need their family." (Ana)*

The professionals that do not work with the women's families explain that this mostly has to do with the challenges related to the practical issues, such as a long distance between the family and the organization's office. Another huge challenge in the cooperation is when family members stigmatize the young women due to their trafficking experience or when the family has been involved in the trafficking. Despite these obstacles, brought up by the professionals, a majority of them do still try to involve the families in the re-integration process if possible, as illustrated below by one of the professionals:

> *"Mostly we try to work with families because we understood during the time that it's very important for them to try and reconnect with. With the families that you know that they're okay and weren't involved in trafficking. Because if there were involved in trafficking, -no way." (Mihaela)*

5.3.4. Considerations and challenges for the professionals

In this section the considerations and challenges for the social work professionals will be discussed. The findings related to these are divided into two parts: the ones related to the young women themselves, and the external challenges and considerations. These matters highly influence the role of the social professional in the re-integration process of the young women.

5.3.4.1. Related to the young women's trafficking experience

Certain challenges and considerations are clearly related to the young women's traumatic experiences of sexual exploitation. Thus, there are special characteristics related to this target group that need to be carefully taken into consideration in the work of the professionals. The professionals state that is important for them to be patient, show empathy, and understand that the healing process takes time.

Another challenge that can arise when working with the women is that they sometimes, due to a lack of trust, hesitate to tell the truth to the professionals about certain things, and easily get into defense mode. Not trusting the professionals' good intentions can sometimes also make the women suspicious towards the offered therapy sessions. The professionals remind that these young women have been treated as objects during the trafficking period, which can lead to many challenges, such as attachment problems as the excerpt below indicates:

> *"These women are not considered as human persons but as objects and this goes on for a long period of time. That is why one has to work on this aspect for a long time because it takes a lot of therapy. [...] It takes a lot of patience with them, a cheerful spirit, - empathy for their suffering." (Iulia)*

According to the interviewed professionals, the women sometimes have a hard time understanding that they actually have been exploited, and instead see the trafficker, who has been using the "Loverboy Method", as their boyfriend. This creates a huge challenge for not only the women themselves, but also for the professionals in their work. The question, raised by some

of the professionals, therefore is how to prevent the "Loverboy Method" from working, when the young women, as anyone, have a need for love and affection. This problematic aspect is addressed in the following excerpt:

> *"And how do you do prevention for the loverboy? Tell the girls not to fall in love? Good luck with that. Especially teenagers." (Gabriela)*

As the professionals describe it, without the women's own will to make a change, and by not being ready to accept the offered help, transforming their life for the better is very hard, sometimes even impossible. Regardless of that, the professionals explain doing their best in answering the young women's individual needs and use their expertise to help them in the best possible way. The excerpt below illustrates how one professional describes this kind of situation:

> *"But then there were also girls that did not want the help and it's very hard to work with them because you can see that [...] they are in very much pain, but they can't really find [...] the door to let it out." (Mihaela)*

The fact that these women are described to have gotten used to living "day by day" creates challenges for the social work professionals when providing assistance. Sometimes this "day by day" mentality can lead to women dropping out of the program, which then leads to the healing process being interrupted. The professionals explain that in some cases those women become re-trafficked or end up in abusive relationships. Nevertheless, sometimes the women are simply just not ready to commit to the re-integration program in that stage of their lives. The professionals see leaving the program and coming back as an understandable and natural part of the women's healing process. In practice it means that when these women drop out of the program, and decide to come back afterwards, the re-integration and healing process, that once got interrupted, will then restart or continue, as portrayed below:

> *"Sometimes they go back into the same situation just for some time. And then they again realize that it's a pattern [...]. There's this click moment that they just feel that they've been in that situation and they have to get out." (Mihaela)*

5.3.4.2. The surrounding society

Obstacles, in the professionals' task to support the re-integration of the young women, also arise from external factors on a societal level. The deficiency in cooperation with different partners in the Romanian system is one example that can create frustration and difficulties in their work. The professionals e.g. narrate how they sometimes face situations where it is evident that police, social workers, and other important actors in the society lack training in the trafficking issue. This often leads to a lack of knowledge and understanding, but sometimes even to the stigmatization of the women. In these situations, professionals find it hard to communicate with the cooperating actors, as illustrated below:

"Every time a girl [a minor beneficiary] run away from our shelter, we have to inform the police. And the second time or third time for the same girl they will say, 'well, why don't you let her do what she wants to do? Because obviously this what she wants'. How can I explain to them? They are not trained police officers. [...], the social workers in child protection, they are not trained properly." (Maria)

Hence, this lack of knowledge and training can make cooperation hard, and when combined with not understanding the sensitivity of the women's cases, it sometimes leads to breach of confidentiality from the partners' side, as one professional explains below:

"There are a lot of confidentiality contracts but that doesn't mean that everyone respects them. Another very hard part of our work is that someone, a partner from an institution or other NGO, is breaking the confidentiality." (Andreea)

The organizations' lack of funding, as discussed earlier, has a negative impact on the young women's re-integration chances. A constrained and unsure budget also makes it impossible to hire enough workers, which in turn becomes a source of frustration and stress for the professionals who feel that they cannot always assist their beneficiaries the way they would need to be assisted, as narrated by one of them below:

"We don't have any type of help from the state. I mean ANITP is here. And all the other institutions are around. But none of them can give us money or help us in any way, but just giving us a paper and saying, 'This is the person, good luck'. [...] It's very hard because even now some of the cases need a lot of more money than we can afford." (Mihaela)

Due to lacking staff many organizations are in need of volunteers to maintain the standards they want to maintain for their assistance. Unfortunately, the organizations experience that there is a general absence of "volunteer mentality" in Romania, which can complicate the process of recruiting people for this purpose.

6. Discussion

This chapter will discuss and analyze the results of the study, presented in the previous chapter, by applying the theories and concepts presented in chapter two. In addition, the findings will be connected to previous research. The chapter is divided into three sections, of which the first one discusses the professionals' views on re-integration and the women's wishes and goals, as well as how these are related to the re-integration process. This is followed by a discussion about what the professionals think can hinder the women from reaching their goals in re-integration. The final section considers the professionals' views on what can help and support the women achieve their goals and be re-integrated into society.

6.1. Re-integrating - Where do the women aim to go?

The first section of this subchapter will discuss and analyze the findings regarding the professionals' views on re-integration with the help of the definition of re-integration and Self-Determination Theory. In the second section, SDT will also be used in analyzing and discussing the findings regarding the young women's wishes and goals and how they are related to the re-integration process.

6.1.1. Viewing the process of re-integration

According to Rodicio (2001:30), the re-integration process can be defined as "the process of inclusion and re-building relationships within a community in the country of origin at four levels: physical, socio-economic, socio-political and cultural". Rodicio's (2001) definition of re-integration clearly includes similar components as the cases described by the professionals as successful ones. These cases include e.g. women who successfully got a job, house or finished their education. All these achievements can be seen as contributing to attaining a dignified standard of living, which is the focus of the socio-economic level of re-integration. In addition to this definition, the findings show that the professionals see the women's personal wishes and goals as crucial in defining what is successful re-integration in every individual case.

Assisted re-integration, according to Bearup (2016), aims to offer social, medical, and psychological care for the victims through comprehensive programs supporting them in their re-integration into society through job training, legal assistance, health care, and preventing stigmatization. The findings of this study similarly show that the anti-trafficking organizations, where the interviewed professionals operate, offer similar kinds of assistance services and programs. Furthermore, the findings of this study show that the professionals consider the role of the assistance and themselves to be of great value for the re-integration of these often very traumatized young women who are usually in great need of support. This view goes in line with the findings by Aninoșanu et al. (2016) and Palmer (2010) who state that the social workers have vital input, and great skills in meeting the needs of young women exploited in trafficking.

The findings show that one way for the professionals to be able to provide the needed support to the young women is to apply individual planning and case management as a work method. This, according to Palmer (2010), is found to be the most valuable form of assistance used with trafficking victims. He states that this is especially valid when practiced in residential facilities,

such as shelters, which is the work setting of many of the interviewed professionals. Thus, the research results from this study support the findings of Aninoșanu at al. (2016), who state that the assistance currently offered in Romania is mainly practiced through individual planning.

The interviewed professionals also highlight the importance of the empowerment approach throughout their work with the young women. This guiding principle pointed out by the professionals is also considered a central aspect of successful re-integration by Surtees (2013) and Palmer (2010). According to Surtees (2013), the empowerment approach includes supporting the person in developing skills towards independency, and to be actively involved in one's own re-integration process. The professionals' way of describing the women as the main actors in their own re-integration processes, is one clear example of how the empowerment approach is put into practice.

The empowerment approach can be connected to the first component of the concept of human needs in SDT: autonomy, which the professionals seem to strengthen by giving the women the power to make their own decisions regarding the assistance. Moreover, the re-integration process is described to aim for the women to not depend on others but rather to be independent; autonomous. These findings are in line with the ones of Berbec et al. (2015) showing that it is important that the trafficking victims' needs, and wishes are put into focus and that they can decide what is the best for them.

Fulfilling the needs of competence and relatedness, the other components of human needs, through the assistance can be seen as important aspects of re-integration. Hence, the interviewed professionals describe how they aim to strengthen the women's competence for example by teaching them life skills and by helping them continue their education. The professionals also facilitate in strengthening the relatedness component, which is linked to the feeling of connectedness with others. This sense of connectedness is crucial for the feeling of being included in different units of society, which, moreover, can be seen as a meaningful outcome of the re-integration process itself. They do this by e.g. supporting the women in strengthening their relationships with family members and other important people around them. If the three needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied, a person will develop healthily, and is able to succeed (Deci & Ryan 2012). This can therefore be connected to the findings of this study showing a clear pattern that the provided assistance aims to satisfy these needs, and by doing so, the professionals can effectively support the women in successfully re-integrating into Romanian society.

6.1.2. The women's wishes and goals and the relation to re-integration

Based on the results of this study the successful re-integration, where this whole process aims to lead, is connected to the wishes and goals of the women themselves. By valuing the women's own decisions and seeing them as the ones knowing what is best for them, achieving their individual future goals are described to determine the state of being successfully re-integrated.

The women's wishes and goals for the future can be divided into the categories of goals related to emotional needs of love, care, and affection; and to the ones related to material needs such as owning a house and finding a job. Similarly, Deci and Ryan (2012) divide life goals into two categories: extrinsic life goals, which mostly concern wealth or being viewed as attractive, and the intrinsic ones, which relate more to one's personal growth, developing meaningful relationships, and being healthy. The findings show that becoming independent is one very important

common goal for many of the young women, which could be linked to both intrinsic and extrinsic life goals through the connection to e.g. managing their own economy, but on the other hand e.g. starting a family. More material goals, such as having a house of their own, can also be seen as a "tool", or an interphase, towards the more intrinsic goals like e.g. regaining custody of one's child. Thus, regarding the results of this study, becoming more independent can refer to, and be connected to both intrinsic and extrinsic life goals.

According to Rotariu (2006), a clear majority (92%) of the interviewed Romanian women in his study think that in order to reach personal fulfillment, an individual should have at least one child. The study also showed that it was very common to think that a woman cannot be fully happy without a child. Rotariu's results can be linked to the findings of this study as the professionals experience that one of the common wishes of the women they meet is related to starting families of their own and having children. In connection to this Aninoșanu et al. (2016) point out that girls and young women in vulnerable states often aim to find a partner and start their own family at a very young age.

Deci and Ryan (2012) state that the social contexts influence whether one's life goals become more intrinsic or extrinsic, which consequently affects the person's important life outcomes. In SDT people are viewed as generally curious, self-motivated, agentic, and inspired. However, at the same time when a person is striving to learn and apply new talents, adversity or other obstacles may hinder these attributes and result in the individual being diminished or crushed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This can also be detected in the findings as the professionals sometimes experience the women having a hard time finding motivation to change their lives, even in cases when they know what they wish for themselves in the future.

People can be motivated by either their personal intrinsic valuation of certain activity or by strong external inference (Deci & Ryan, 2012). The findings of this study show that the social work professionals value the women's own motivation and want to support them in the process of finding their own visions and goals. Thus, the professionals' views are found to promote the women's autonomous motivation. Furthermore, a secure relational base is found to be important for the expression of intrinsic motivation, and it is found to be stronger in cases where a person has experienced security and attachment in their childhood (Frodi et al., 1985). As the findings show, the young women that the professionals assist, have often experienced insecurity and poor attachment in their childhood. Moreover, the interviewed professionals described at times to have challenges in motivating these women who often need the support in finding their future goals and life aspirations. Therefore, the study by Frodi et al. (1985) can be seen to support the findings of the challenges faced in assisting victims of trafficking as a target group.

Ryan and Deci (2000) state that when an external intervention happens, it cultivates certain behaviors in a person, and the motivation can vary from motivation to resistance, or from passive compliance to active commitment. In cases where a person lacks control, she is most likely to become *amotivated* - a state of complete lack of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). According to the findings of this study, it is evident that the professionals find it important to respect and strengthen the women's autonomy in the process, and that the goals, that they work on, are the ones that the women themselves truly want to achieve. The findings also show that the professionals value the women's own wishes and goals, and do not want to have control over them. Furthermore, the professionals strongly believe that everyone is talented and capable of reaching their goals despite all the emotional and physical damage that the trafficking period has caused them. They find the core of this process to be the inner motivation, proper time provided for the healing, and last but certainly not least: the support of others. The professionals' views are considered to go in line with DeHaan et al. (2015:2039) who state that from the perspective

of SDT people are "inherently oriented toward actualizing their capabilities, through processes that include intrinsic motivation, social internalization and integration, and connecting with others".

6.2. Obstacles on the path to re-integration

This section will discuss and analyze the hindering elements, that the young women might confront on their path to re-integration, through the theory of social support and the concept of agency. As the lack of social support seems to be a crucial constraining factor this will be the main focus of this section.

6.2.1. The lack of social support

According to Vaux (1990), social support can be provided by different sources, such as family and friends but can also have a more structural character and derive from e.g. government support programs. Vaux (1990:507) describes it as a "complex process unfolding in an ecological context [...] involving transactions between people and their social networks, including the active development and maintenance of support network resources, the management of support incidents to elicit appropriate supportive behavior from the network and the synthesis of information to yield support appraisals".

The findings show that young women who, as children, have not experienced social support in the form of love and attachment from their family, many times face complications in the re-integration process. Sarason et al. (1991) have found empirical associations between early attachment experiences and retro perspective perceptions of parental care and the actual perceived social support. Similarly, Wallace and Vaux (1993:362) found that adults who experience insecure attachment styles "are more likely to endorse beliefs and expectations reflecting the risks, costs, and futility of seeking help from network members". Connecting back to the findings of this study, these help understand why the young women, who lacked social support and attachment in their childhood, can face difficulties trusting the intention of the professionals, opening up to receive their support, and also in creating new supportive social resources.

Moreover, many of these women have been raised in institutions or in families with poor socioeconomic backgrounds. According to Belle (1982), their, and/or their parents' ascribed social roles, as e.g. single parent, being poor, being an orphan etc. also shape opportunities to develop and use existing support resources. The findings clearly show that the professionals have experienced how the young women who had experienced a lack of attachment and love, often had been raised in institutions or in broken families, and therefore also lacked existing healthy family relations. Especially growing up in an institution or in poor circumstances can indicate that the women have also experienced a lack of inclusion in Romanian society prior to being trafficked. According to Social Support Theory, there is a connection between one's support resources, the appraisal of these, self-esteem, social discomfort, low autonomy, and mistrust (Vaux, 1990).

However, the professionals have seen that also the young women who used to have healthy family relations prior to the trafficking period can face tensions in these relationships during the post-trafficking phase. According to Vaux (1990), environmental demands and stressors

influence the support process and can in some cases extinguish and exhaust the existing support resources. The trafficking experience is a huge stressor and trauma not only for the young women, but also for their family members, who may be secondary victims (Surtees & Brunovskis, 2012a). This implies that the trafficking experience can even strain healthy relationships, and thus negatively affect the social support when it is needed the most. The findings indicate that the women's families sometimes fail to provide social support and affection since they have a hard time understanding what has actually happened or feel like they have failed as parents. These findings are in line with previous research indicating that "parents who have been unable to care for and protect their child may feel frustration, guilt and shame, not least because of social norms of parental care and family support" (ibid, 2012a:7).

Earlier research on social support has shown that support relations are especially negatively affected when they are stigmatizing or relentless, which can lead to disruption or termination of the support resource (Vaux, 1990). Similarly, the results show that the young women are sometimes rejected by their own families or communities when it is revealed that they have been trafficked. These findings are in line with earlier research stating that families might reject the women due to stigma, especially if associated with prostitution, and when they have not contributed to economic enhancement through the trafficking period (Talens & Landman, 2003).

The research findings also illustrate that the professionals point out the lack of social support at the governmental level as a powerful constraining factor. The lack of knowledge and interest in the issue of human trafficking, together with the stigmatization of the victims, have resulted in a lack of support programs for the women, including financial and housing aid. Furthermore, the findings show that access to legal justice is many times out of reach for the women. When these social support resources are weak, or cannot be relied on, the women's subjective appraisal of the support behavior, within these relationships, will be low and probably mistrusting (Vaux, 1990).

6.2.2. When agency is narrowed

Rogers et al. (2013) defines the concept of agency as a capacity possessed by people to act of their own free will. It arises from, and is related to, the options made available by a person's position in a wider context such as society, economy, culture, and political system (ibid.). This clear connection the person's winder context can be linked to the findings of this study showing that the young women often come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, which Lăzăroui and Alexandru (2003), and Aninoșanu et al. (2016) have also found to be common for the potential victims of trafficking. As the poor socio-economic situation is related to the person's possibilities to practice their agency, the re-integration process can be seen to have an important focus on enhancing the women's socio-economic situations in order to strengthen the women's previously narrowed agency in the pre-trafficking period. Moreover, for the women to lift themselves up from their previous socio-economic situations, the re-integration assistance aims to make sure that these women would not be in vulnerable situations anymore but that they would rather be strong agents of their own life.

The factors related to lacking social support in a person's surrounding environment, discussed in the previous subchapter, can be seen to narrow down the young women's agency in their re-integration process. This is due to the strong impact of social support, which can, when lacking, hinder the women's chances to act according to their own will and limit their capacity. Lacking

social support such as healthy family relations can negatively affect the woman's chances to work towards their goals set for their re-integration due to the lacking feeling of being supported by the important people around them emotionally but also practically. Also, other factors constraining the re-integration process, which have been presented in the finding chapter, can be viewed as likely to be narrowing the young women's agency in their re-integration. Thus, it is not only the previously discussed lack of social support that weakens these women's agency, but also the challenges on the level of their personal attributes e.g. lack of self-esteem and hope, lack of long-term perspective, and lack of motivation.

The professionals describe in the findings that the young women often suffer from trauma as a result of the trafficking period. This goes in line with other previous research such as IOM (2017) pointing out the high prevalence of trauma among trafficking victims. Traumas can also be seen as limiting the women's agency since they might set limits or slow down the healing process and affect the general mental health status of the women. In connection to this Hitlin and Johnson (2015) claim that agency is not strictly an inborn psychological feature or a motivational drive, but rather an individually developed resource varying across social stratification, personal experiences, and one's life course. Thus, the women's living circumstances can affect their agency and create obstacles for them to act of their full potential.

The wider social context affecting a person's agency, e.g. economy and political system (Rogers et al., 2013) can be seen to narrow not only the young women's, but also the professionals' agency. The findings of this study clearly show that the lack of funding limits the professionals' possibilities to act and weakens their capacity to assist the women the best way they can. The limitations in assistance caused by the lack of funding can therefore be seen to have a link to both the professionals' and the young women's narrowed agency. Furthermore, in the case of re-integrating victims of trafficking, Talens and Landman (2003) highlight the state's role as the main actor responsible for its citizens' rights, and in ensuring security. This implies that the state's actions or rather lack of actions in e.g. adequately funding the anti-trafficking organizations will have an effect on all actors in the re-integration process. Thus, Bandura's (2000) statement about a person not having direct control over institutional practices and the social conditions around them, can be connected to the situation where the agency of the professionals and the young women in Romania is narrowed by the surrounding circumstances, such as the state's actions. The actions of the state affect both the young women and the professionals, however, they do not have the power to affect or change these actions.

6.3. Finding their way - how re-integration is facilitated

This section will address the elements that help and support the women on their way to re-integration, focusing on the importance of social support as a facilitating factor. This will be done by analyzing and discussing social support with the help of Social Support Theory, and the concept of agency.

6.3.1. How social support enhances the women's re-integration

According to Kelly (2016:31), there are empirical associations indicating that "positive social interactions facilitate the cognitive and emotional processing required for successful adjustment and support the development of more positive appraisals of the traumatic event and its consequences". Moreover, it has been found that individuals who have positive appraisals of their social support resources also experience an increased wellbeing (Vaux, 1990). Likewise, the research findings show that professionals experience that the women with healthy support relations cope and heal better after the traumatic period of trafficking and are thereby also more likely to successfully re-integrate and reach their goals. The professionals especially highlight the important role of the women's families, and the fact that, when these relations are healthy, they can provide the women the kind of love and support that cannot be replaced by the professionals or anyone else. Correspondingly, previous research underlines the importance of the family, and states that it is a key factor in lowering the risks and vulnerabilities of the young women, and thus helps decrease the risk of re-trafficking (Aninoșanu et al., 2016).

Very often the family does not only provide emotional support, but also economic stability (Surtees & Brunovskis, 2012a). This financial support is often vital in the Romanian society, where, as previously discussed, victims of trafficking lack sufficient social support in terms of economic assistance. When these young women lack this kind of support resources, or the family has no means to provide for them financially, the organization's support plays a crucial role. The organization can help the women financially by managing their assigned re-integration or repatriation budget, and through providing housing in the organization's shelter.

Furthermore, findings from this study show that aside from families and the organizations, also friends, co-workers, classmates, and other beneficiaries in the re-integration program can bring important social support for the women.

6.3.2. The professionals' role in strengthening the women's social support

The results of this study clearly convey the active and important role of the professionals throughout the women's re-integration process. The professionals can provide tangible support, not only in form of financial and housing aid, but also support of emotional and informational nature. According to Schaefer et al. (1981), tangible support can egg be some form of direct aid, while emotional support makes a person feel cared about, and includes the aspect of being able to trust and rely on other people. Informational support can be given in form of feedback and advice, helping a person solve a problem (Schaefer et al., 1981). The interviewed professionals narrate how they see themselves as "a friend", "a sister" or "a mother" to the young women, and how they from that aspect provide emotional support to the young women. In their

role as professionals they do clearly provide informational support through their various working methods. For instance, job-seeking activities might teach the women how to approach an employer, while counselling sessions can advise them on how to go about solving issues with their family or help them work on their distrust of others.

By using a working approach that focuses on the individual and their needs, the professionals have excellent possibilities to help strengthen the women's support resources. According to Vaux's (1990) definition of social support, the approach provides a fitting framework for professionals' intervention aiming to develop and maintain a person's support resources. One step is to identify strengths and weaknesses in the individual's support network, which can help "reveal strengths in relationships, potential for improvement, deficits and areas of risks" (Vaux, 1990:513), and in this way help the individual understand, utilize, and manage the resources well. The interviewed professionals explain how they work in a similar manner by mapping the young women's resources and social networks at an early stage of the re-integration process. In this way both they and the women are able to see who the women have in their life that could support them throughout the re-integration process. The findings also show how the professionals try to develop the healthy relations that are present in the women's lives and assist when e.g. parents are upset or frustrated by offering family counselling and mediation.

Another intervention strategy is to support individuals with limited support networks to establish new relationships by e.g. providing environments that facilitate interactions (Vaux, 1990). The findings show that this is a common working method for the professionals assisting the young women. They explain how they try to facilitate the development of new support resources by providing platforms for interactions, as well as trying to find "new" relatives, that have not been present in the women's lives prior to the trafficking period, and who could provide vital support. Finally, this type of intervention can visibilize the support resources that are not healthy and come with a cost, such as a neglecting parent or an abusive partner. The aim here is not to ruthlessly dismiss this relationship, but rather "to facilitate a realistic appraisal of the relationship with respect to long-term costs and benefits" (Vaux, 1990:515). This is especially important in connection to the research findings showing that a majority of the young women have been recruited through the "Loverboy Method". According to the findings, professionals have seen that many of the victims of this recruitment method relapse into abusive relationships, whereby the professionals have an important role in creating awareness about how the women can appraise these kinds of relationships without unhealthy costs.

6.3.3. The role of strengthened agency in re-integration

Agency has, as discussed, an important role in the young women's re-integration process, and it is also central in the professionals' task of providing assistance. As the findings of this study show, the professionals use supportive, strengthening, and motivational approaches when assisting the young women. These approaches can be seen to strengthen the women's agency through for example widening their capacity to become independent, to act in different social environments, and to develop different coping mechanisms to deal with the traumas many of them suffer from. As the women's motivation and self-trust are strongly linked to the facilitation of re-integration, the professionals work hard to strengthen these in the re-integration process, e.g. through counselling. As the findings also reveal, the professionals work on improving the young women's feeling of safety, which can also be viewed as an effective way to broaden and support their agencies. Hence, the feeling of safety can be viewed as a foundation for being able to act upon one's free will and to follow and to reach one's goals.

Social support, which has been discussed above, can also widen the women's agency due to the assistance and encouragement it can bring to their lives. Social support can also facilitate the women's initiative to act according to their own will e.g. by promoting the women's possibilities to reach their goals. However, even if the women are lacking e.g. family support, other forms of social support can still balance their situations, and positively affect their narrowed, or weak, possibilities to practice their agency.

Talens and Landman (2003) highlight the role of a person's own coping mechanisms and characteristics in re-integration. Similarly, according to the findings of this study, the women's own personal resources such as their skills and capacities, seem to play a paramount role. This also correlates with Surtees' (2012) findings that the individual's own situation, e.g. responsibilities, ambitions and plans, skills, psychological state, and aptitude are directly linked to an individual's success in re-integrating. In relation to this study, these capacities and attributes could be linked to how the professionals view the women's own resources as "a base to build on". Furthermore, it could be said that these individual resources can strengthen and widen their agency by opening up possibilities to reach their goals.

The previously discussed approach of having the individual in the center, including case management, can be helpful in detecting what hinders the agency of each woman, and what kind of measures should be taken to widen it. The professionals explain that these approaches, are therefore used to map the women's individual resources. Mapping as a method can be understood as strengthening the women's agency, which in turn can help them cope with their environment. The findings show that the professionals do assist the women individually on their personal level (e.g. teaching life skills and building up their motivation through individual counselling), but they also provide assistance in the context of their environment e.g. within schools, families, and other authorities. This can be viewed to strengthen the women's agency on both of these levels. Hugman (2009) also states that social work aims to understand the person's interaction in relation to the surrounding environment. However, the agency is either supported or restricted by the environment (Hugman, 2009). This is due to the fact that individuals exist within the context of the social structure and can therefore also affect each other (Burke & Stets, 2009). In line with this, Wheeler-Brooks (2009) states that a person's agency cannot always be completed to the fullest on their own, since stigma and shame often accompany oppression. This implies that the professionals have to take into account that the young women's agency might be lowered due to the trafficking experience, as well as how their agency relates to structural dimensions of e.g. stigma.

Palmer (2010) highlights the role of the professionals in teaching the women life skills, and in supporting them in becoming independent. This view goes hand in hand with the findings and can be understood to contribute to supporting and strengthening the women's agency as e.g. learning life skills adds to their repertoire of cultural and societal competence. The professionals also stated that the informal education provided e.g. in a family environment can teach the women important things related to handling different kinds of life situations by providing tools for confronting and coping with challenges in the post-trafficking phase. This informal education could be seen as adding something positive to one's capacities and can also facilitate one's chances to act according to their own will, which therefore widens the women's personal agency.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to explore how the social work professionals describe re-integration of young female victims of sex trafficking in Romania. This chapter will briefly summarize the findings, and thereby answer the research questions. In order to address the aforementioned research aim, the following research questions have been guiding this study: 1) How do the social work professionals describe successful re-integration of sex trafficking victims?, 2) From the perspective of the social work professionals, which factors constrain or facilitate the successful re-integration?; and 3) How do the social work professionals view their own role in the re-integration process?

1. *How do the social work professionals describe successful re-integration of sex trafficking victims?*

The findings of this study show that all professionals have experienced cases that they describe as successful. What is considered to be a successful re-integration case varies and depends on the woman and what she is aiming for. Nevertheless, there are five main patterns found related to the cases described as successful by the professionals. The first theme is connected to gaining financial security, the second to stable and secure housing, and the third to finishing one's education. The following pattern was showed to be related to achieving and maintaining healthy relationships, while the last one is connected to the women gaining legal justice in relation to them being victims of human trafficking.

The findings show that the women's individual wishes and goals for their future are connected to the successfulness of their re-integration. Hence, the professionals have experienced that what the women strive to do or become will lead to a meaningful, and successful re-integration in their specific cases. The findings further display that the women's wishes, and goals differ depending on the individual. However, a clear pattern could be identified showing that their life goals can be divided into two main categories. The first one includes material needs such as having a job, money, and a house. The second category represents emotional needs and wishes to have love and care in their life e.g. by having children or finding a partner. Both of these categories were found to be connected to the wish of being independent.

2. *From the perspective of the social work professionals, which factors constrain or facilitate the successful re-integration?*

The professionals operating in Romanian anti-trafficking organizations identify several constraining and facilitating factors in the re-integration process of the young women they meet. The constraining factors become hindering elements, that can slow down or make the re-integration impossible for the young women. Constraining factors are mainly related to a lack of social support resources in different levels. The constraining factors relate to the lack of these resources in early childhood, reflecting attachment issues, which in turn complicates trust and relationship building as an adult. The lack of support can also mean not having family or friends as well as the missing social support from society in form of e.g. financial aid. Stigma is pointed

out as a huge challenge to the re-integration, since it can hinder different social support resources from being activated or simply exhaust them, e.g. when the families choose to reject the women. Personal characteristics and attributes, such as the lack of motivation or life skills, were also found to constrain the women's ability to achieve their goals, and hence also the women's ability to successfully re-integrate into Romanian society.

The research findings clearly show that a certain factor, that becomes constraining when lacking, can, on the other hand, facilitate the re-integration when it is existing. Social networks and support resources were found to be highly linked to successful re-integration, and the women's wellbeing throughout the process. Especially contributing to a positive outcome is when the family is supportive and active in the re-integration. A great positive impact of healthy and supportive social relations can also be achieved through interactions with e.g. the professionals, friends or colleagues. Moreover, motivation as well as the women's mindset and attitude towards changing their life and being participative in the re-integration program were seen to be facilitating factors in the re-integration.

3. *How do the social work professionals view their own role in the re-integration process?*

Even though the professionals see themselves as an important part in the women's re-integration phase, they describe their role as complementary, while the women themselves are seen as the main actors in the process. The assistance is mostly provided from a perspective where the women's individual situations, needs and resources are considered and worked on. By mapping each woman's skills and resources, also the external support mechanisms are spotted and can be worked on. This is done, for instance, by creating platforms to enhance social networks as well as by strengthening healthy family relations through e.g. mediation or counselling with family members. The young women's' personal resources, such as their skills and capacities, are thus seen as a foundation for the social work practice. Moreover, the organizations can be a great source of different types of social support. Not only can they provide emotional support, but also informational support in form of e.g. advice and tangible support, such as financial security and housing in shelters.

Furthermore, the findings clearly point out how, not only the young women, but also the professionals, are affected and controlled by their environment. Their agency and possibility to act as workers are regulated by the surrounding structure, such as e.g. the lack of political interest, knowledge and training in the trafficking issue, resulting in cooperation difficulties with other actors. Also, the lack of funding is pointed out as having a constraining effect on their work as the organizations would often need more staff and resources for the beneficiaries, whose chances of re-integration can otherwise be negatively affected. In conclusion, the social work professionals have a crucial role in supporting the young women in achieving their goals and in being re-integrated into Romanian society. Through this support the professionals also help reduce the risk of being re-trafficked, which is a common consequence of unsuccessful re-integration.

Finally, in the following subchapter the potential implications of this study will be discussed followed by suggestions for further research.

7.1. Implications of this study

Due to the scarce amount of earlier research on the re-integration process of trafficking victims, this study is able to contribute to an understanding of the social work professionals' important role in the re-integration phase, as well as of what is crucial for them to be supported with, in order to fulfill their meaningful task. Ideally, through the increased attention, which the professionals can gain from this study, their importance could be further acknowledged. Moreover, by pointing out the professionals' common experiences and challenges, this study can potentially strengthen the Romanian anti-trafficking field and enhance and broaden the professional identity of these assistance providers. By reading this paper, the professionals providing assistance to Romanian trafficking victims trafficked abroad can also learn about the provided assistance and the re-integration process in Romania. This increased knowledge and understanding can contribute to strengthening the cooperation between the operators in destination countries and in Romania.

As stigma is found to be a severe issue appearing in different levels of Romanian society and hindering both the professionals' work and the young women's re-integration process, it needs to be further addressed and tackled. This study also brings attention to the need for training among different actors in Romanian society who meet trafficking victims, law enforcement in particular. This would not only aid the social work professionals in their work by making it easier to cooperate with different actors, but also facilitate the victims' re-integration. The anti-trafficking field as a whole would benefit from such a facilitated cooperation. Furthermore, the lack of funds, highlighted in the findings, is limiting the professionals' work. By shining light on this issue, in relation to the important work of the anti-trafficking organizations, this study can hopefully help improve the funding possibilities of the organizations. Better economic resources provided to the organizations would create better circumstances to assist the young women in their re-integration phase as well as improved working conditions for the professionals.

In line with many other studies, this research shows a clear connection between unsuccessful re-integration and re-trafficking. These findings help emphasize the important role of the social work professionals in preventing the mental and physical suffering that being re-trafficked would imply for the women. Additionally, this study also helps understand the possible economic implications for governments. Hence, if they facilitated the re-integration process by providing the women and the organizations the resources they need, they would be able to save money in the long run by minimizing the risk of re-trafficking. In this way the governments would avoid future costs, through providing quality assistance to those who seek assistance with re-integration.

7.2. Suggestions for further research

The role of social work professionals providing social support is crucial in prevention of trafficking, re-integration, as well as in prevention of re-trafficking. Compared to the highlighted importance of the social work professionals in the light of current research, their voices are heard somewhat rarely. It would therefore be interesting to further study the social work professionals' role in different levels of the anti-trafficking work, by taking their knowledge into consideration.

As pointed out in this and other studies, trafficking victims' family members are affected by the trafficking experiences as well, or in other cases are even involved in trafficking. Due to the lack of focus on the perspective of the family members, and how they experience the various trafficking phases, it would be another interesting aspect to study further.

Various aspects of the sex trafficking cycle are still not researched to a satisfactory degree. One important aspect, that could be looked into further, is the cooperation between countries where the women are trafficked to and countries where they originate from. For instance, it would be fundamental to understand how the working methods and/or requirements (attached to economical support of trafficking victims or the organization itself) affect the re-integration work in the country of origin, such as Romania. Disparities in the financial support of trafficking victims depending on whether they have been trafficked abroad, and return with financial assistance, or inside the country of origin, where they depend on the country's social system, should be studied in order to see how they affect the re-integration chances. At last, to fully understand the phenomenon of sex trafficking it is crucial to further study the demand for buying sex, and how to tackle it.

Trafficking for sexual purposes is a highly lucrative business where traffickers gain enormous amounts of money by selling women's bodies and thereby meeting the demand of the sex buyers. Victims of sex trafficking often originate from socio-economic disadvantaged backgrounds, which makes the issue strongly connected to poverty. Moreover, sex trafficking is an alarmingly feminized phenomenon, with the vast majority of the victims being women. Being such a severe poverty and gender related problem, it is crucial to address it further, in order to prevent trafficking and decrease the demand of buying women's bodies. Added research in the field can help understand and improve the conditions of young women vulnerable to trafficking in Romania and the rest of the world. Additionally, it can further bring light to the important work done by the anti-trafficking organizations in both the victims' country of origin and the countries where they are trafficked to, and in doing so give further political attention to the issue.

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Appendix 1. Information letter about the study

We are looking for you, a social work professional doing anti-trafficking work!

We are Maria-Elisa Stenius and Valentina Barchiesi, currently studying at the Master's program in Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. We are conducting a study for our thesis about the re-integration process of young female victims of sex trafficking, from the perspective of the social work professionals working in anti-trafficking organizations in Romania.

We will be in Romania on February 2019 to interview social work professionals. If you are interested in being interviewed, we kindly ask you to contact us on one of the e-mail addresses below. We are interested in your experience of social work practice in the re-integration process. Whether you have a degree in social work or not, is not relevant for the study. We would appreciate this opportunity to learn from your knowledge and experience and be able to gain from it in our thesis.

Data collection: The interview will be held in English and take about 1 hour. If you allow us, we would like to record it. The interview can be held in any place suitable and comfortable for you between the 7th and 25th of February 2019. Detailed day, time and place can be discussed, and we are happy to work around your schedule.

Confidentiality: The information collected during this study will remain confidential. Your names, the name of your organization, or any other personal or identifying details will not be revealed. The results of the study will be published in the form of a thesis which will be presented and published at the Gothenburg University database, GUPEA.

Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time.

Kindly, contact us anytime for further questions or clarifications if needed. Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely yours,

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Appendix 2. Informed consent

Informed consent

We, Maria- Elisa Stenius and Valentina Barchiesi are conducting a research project as part of our education in at the International Master's program in Social Work and Human Rights at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. We aim to study the re-integration of victims of sex-trafficking in Romania from the perspective of social work professionals working in anti-trafficking organizations.

 In order to ensure that our project meets the ethical requirements for good research we promise to adhere to the following principles:
 • Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
 • Interviewees have the right to decide whether he or she will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded.
 • The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no un-authorized person can view or access it.

If the interviewee consents to it, the interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for us to document what is said during the interview and also helps us in the continuing work with the project. In our analyze some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project, the data will be destroyed. The data we collect will only be used in this project. The final version of the thesis can be sent to you in your e-mail.
You have the right to decline answering any questions or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.
You are welcome to contact us or our supervisor in case you have any question;

Maria-Elisa Stenius	**Valentina Barchiesi**	**Ninni Carlsson**
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Signature of research participant   *Date and place of signature*

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Signature of researcher/student   *Date and place of signature*

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Signature of researcher/student   *Date and place of signature*

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Appendix 3. Interview guide

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

- Briefly describe the aim and purpose of the study and the interview
- Hand out and sign consent form
- Clarify important details about the practical implications of the interview (recording, storing of data, confidentiality)
- Ask if there are any questions before we start

Introduction questions:

1. Could you shortly introduce yourself?
2. How long have you been working in x organization?
3. Do you have experience working with trafficking victims (or similar) from before?
4. What is your educational background?

Part I

1. Can you shortly describe a normal day at work for you?

2. Do you have specific programs or activities to help female victims of sex-trafficking to be included and independent in society (again)?

3. Have you experienced cases where your work has successfully affected clients in this process? Can you tell us more about such a case/ those cases?

4. What factors would you say made the case/cases successful?

5. How do you feel that you could affect on the outcome of this case/s?

Backup question - if it is not brought up:
- What tools and methods did you use in these cases?

Part II

1. Have you experienced a case/s that didn't go that well? Can you tell us more about such a case?

2. Why do you think it didn't work out in this case?

3. Do you think there are some special aspects to take into consideration when working with women trafficked for sexual purposes?

Backup question - if it is not brought up:
- Can you describe a situation where you in your role have faced difficulties working with these cases?
- What other reasons/factors can there be when a case didn't go well?
- What other risk/consequences are there in these cases?

Part III

1. What personal resources would you say influence how well the client can be included and independent in the society?

2. What other resources around the client can help her to reach the state of inclusion and independence?

3. How do you use these resources when working with the client?

Backup question - if it is not brought up:
● Would you say that the motivation of the client plays a role in how well the case goes?
● Would you say that the resources of the client are important in order for her to re-integrate?
● Are these resources important tools for social work professionals in the re-integration work? How?

Ending question:
● Is there anything else you'd like to add?